THE VANISHING DIAMOND

OR

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By SIR GILBERT CAMPBELL, BART.

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A STORY OF THE HIMALAYAS

BY

SIR GILBERT CAMPBELL, BART.,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF MANDEVILLE SQUARE," "ON A WINTER'S NIGHT,"
ETC., ETC.

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THE VANISHING DIAMOND.

A STORY OF THE HIMALAYAS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CATACLYSM.

FAR away amidst the wide valleys which are to be found in the giant range of mountains which run from the eastern to the western shores of the great Indian peninsula was a small tea plantation, which was a perfect model of the most careful and exquisite cultivation. The low land which lay upon each side of the little babbling stream which flowed through the centre of the valley was a mass of flaming white blossoms, and the artificial terraces, which ran for some distance up the hill slopes, were full of the promise of an abundant harvest. The lofty banana trees, which clothed the banks of the stream, were radiant with the huge emerald-tinted leaves with their luscious pendulous bunches of fruit. Whilst, far above, the hills were gay with the wild apricot with its snowy blossoms, the rhododendron with its wealth of purple and scarlet flowers, and further still, cutting the sky-line, were the cedars (Cedrus diodoia) with their huge branches almost sweeping the ground, mingled with large clumps of straight-leaved holly and the Himalayan oak.

Situated on a small plateau some thirty feet above the river's bank was a pretty little cottage with a shingle roof, and the outbuildings necessary for the treatment of the leaves of the tea shrub. There was a small garden in front, the beds of which were filled with flowers of every kind and hue. Leaning

over the railings which ran round the plateau was a tall, grey-bearded man some fifty years of age, and by his side was a bright, intelligent youth, over whose head some sixteen summers had passed. The pair were Mr. Macalpine, a retired government official, and his son. After leaving the service, Mr. Macalpine had purchased an extensive tract of land in the Shallee Valley, some sixteen miles from the well-known station of Simla, and bringing some previous experience he had acquired to bear, had, with the assistance of his son Donald, begun a fresh career as a tea-planter. Mrs. Macalpine, Eva, his daughter, and Donald, were the only members of the family, and for some five years his speculation had proved an uninterrupted success.

"I cannot understand what is the cause of the stream below running dry," remarked Mr. Macalpine, gazing thoughtfully at the slender crystal thread of water which rippled sluggishly over the pebbles. "At this time of year we have always had plenty of water, and if the present scarcity goes on increasing the bed of the river will be entirely dry."

"It is very curious," answered Donald, "and I can tell you that the coolies on the estate are getting very uneasy, and are collecting in groups and muttering to themselves. Unless the water returns, I expect that some of them will show us a clean pair of heels."

"Who told you this?" asked his father.

"Dhurrumdasa, the Ladâki," replied the boy; "and here he comes and can tell you all about it himself."

As he spoke, a man dressed in *puttoo* (a coarse cloth made from the under coating of goat-skin hair) came leisurely up to the father and son. He was very short and broad-shouldered, and had the flat nose and almost Mongolian cast of features which are found amongst the natives in Ladâki. Two or three large but green-hued turquoise were fastened across his forehead by a narrow cord of horsehair, and upon his head he wore a flat cap somewhat resembling the Blue bonnet of the Scotch.

"Well, Dhurrumdasa," remarked Mr. Macalpine, addressing him in English: "can you tell me what is the meaning of this strange occurrence?"

"Sahib," replied the man, speaking in the same tongue, but slowly and with some difficulty, "it is beyond the power of your servant to reply. Before you taught me to follow in the footsteps of the true God, I should have thought that the demons who I once believed dwelt in the forests and hills

were angry and desired to be propitiated with sacrifices. Now, however, I know that such beings do not exist, and all is the work of the Great Ruler of the Universe, but I will not try to hide from the sahib that the coolies are terribly alarmed, and that if this drought continues we shall be left without hands to carry on the work."

"It is very curious," returned Mr. Macalpine; "I do not remember such an occurrence taking place before."

"An old coolie," rejoined the Ladâki, "says that many years ago the waters stopped running through the hills, and that people crossed over the great river at Loodiana dryshod."

"It is not the coolies alone who are uneasy," remarked Donald; "see there!" and as he spoke he pointed to a small grove of trees further down the river.

His father followed the direction of his finger, and saw that a little colony of monkeys which had been permitted to remain there undisturbed had left their residence, and with many strange sounds and gestures were making for the higher grounds. A flock of sandpipers and small curlew were also skimming over the water uttering shrill cries, and with a lithe bound a leopard darted from a thicket and sped up the steep slope of the hill.

"The brute creation does indeed seem uneasy," said the tea-planter, "but the reason why is still an utter mystery to me."

"Look, father, at that huge black cloud that has risen over the Shallee mountain," exclaimed Donald, suddenly; "and hark to the dull grinding of the thunder. Can we be going to have a storm? It will be very strange if we do at this season of the year."

"That is not thunder, sahib," remarked Dhurrumdasa. "I have never heard it before, and yet it seems strangely familiar to me."

The air had now become terribly oppressive, and the sky was completely overcast. Frightened birds flew hither and thither, uttering plaintive cries of alarm. Sheep and goats ran wildly across the valley and made for the higher grounds, whilst the three spectators gazed into each other's faces with blank surprise.

"Sahib," said Dhurrumdasa, "the Almighty has given these creatures the instinct to forewarn them of coming danger. Call the Mem Sahib and the Missie Baba, and let us ascend, for a time at least, to the higher grounds. If there is no danger we can again return to the house."

At this moment Mrs. Macalpine and Eva, who had been alarmed by the oppressive darkness, came out, and after a few words of explanation followed Mr. Macalpine up a winding path, which in a few minutes placed them some two hundred feet above the bed of the river. Hardly had they gained this comparatively secure position than a wild cry of dismay was heard, and the coolies and labourers on the estate could be seen flying before what appeared to be a huge brown wall which was advancing with terrible velocity down the valley.

"Merciful powers!" cried the tea-planter, "I see it all now; it is a cataclysm."

"A cataclysm!" repeated his son.

"Yes, the bed of the stream has been blocked up somewhere in the interior of the hills by a landslip, and now the pent-up waters have burst their way out and are carrying ruin and destruction in their path."

The great mass of water, in which limbs of trees were whirling about like mere straws, was now close at hand, and had risen above the plateau upon which the house stood. The beautiful tea shrubs with all their white blossoms had disappeared under a flood of muddy water, and as Mrs. Macalpine gazed with clasped hands at the work of destruction she saw the house in which she had spent so many happy years give way, and then, with a harsh rending of disjointed woodwork, subside into the boiling flood that dashed angrily along as though utterly careless of the ruin that it had inflicted.

Donald and Eva gazed upon the cruel scene with countenances of the deepest dismay, and Mr. Macalpine for a moment covered his face with his hands as though unable to bear the sight of the destruction of all his hopes for the future.

At length, however, he seemed to recover himself, and turning to his wife, said:

"The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."

"Yes, sahib," broke in Dhurrumdasa, "and remember if you have lost all, these precious jewels are still left to you;" and as he spoke he pointed to Mrs. Macalpine and the two children. "Besides," he added after a short pause, "we can easily get the plantation into working order again."

"No, no, Dhurrumdasa," replied Mr. Macalpine, shaking his head; "the whole soil has been torn up, and we can never hope to do any good with the place again. It is useless tarrying here; we have lost all, and the only thing that we can do is to make our way to Simla, for there is no use in waiting

about this scene of desolation. Come, my dear," he added, turning to his wife, and, taking her arm, the ruined tea-planter and his family, followed by the faithful Ladâki, moved through the pine-clad hills in the direction of the main road that leads from Simla to Nah Kunda.

CHAPTER II.

THE VANISHING DIAMOND.

SOME three weeks had elapsed since the terrible convulsion of nature which had destroyed Mr. Macalpine's plantation, as well as causing devastation and destruction to many a village and hamlet which was situated in the course of the destroying torrent. Fortunately Mr. Macalpine had still his very liberal pension as a retired government official to fall back upon, but all the money that he had expended upon his plantation, the erection of his house and the necessary plant and machinery for the carrying on of the manufacture, was irretrievably lost. However, the result was not absolute ruin, and the Macalpines had now begun to look upon the terrible misfortune that had befallen them with calmer feelings. It had been settled that Mrs. Macalpine, whose constitution had received a severe shock, should for a time return to England, and that Eva should accompany her, whilst her husband and Donald should remain in the hills and see if some fresh opportunity for profitable employment might not arise.

Mr. Macalpine was one day lounging in a bamboo chair in the verandah of their new home in Simla, gazing moodily over the fair scene that stretched far away before his eyes. The long white road leading to the plains wound like a huge snake round the hills, now visible for miles, and again disappearing as it was lost to sight behind the shoulder of some hill. At the foot of the hills was the tableland that separates the Himalayas lowest range, called the Sewaliks, and beyond that the plains themselves, the haze which hung over them shimmering in the intense heat, whilst the pools and lake, with which the country was dotted, glistened like diamonds in the rays of the sun, and the temples and public buildings of the towns rose up like the castles upon a chess-board. But the fair panorama that was unrolled before him seemed to have no charms for the

ruined tea-planter, and more than once he struck his forehead as he reviewed and cast aside many new projects for the future employment of his remaining capital. Donald was cleaning a favourite rifle, which by a stroke of good luck had been sent in to Simla for repairs, and so had escaped the general destruction of the rest of the property; whilst Dhurrumdasa, squatted down native fashion at a respectful distance, watched the father and son with an expression of the deepest interest, while over his flat, broad features shone a gleam of intelligence. Suddenly Mr. Macalpine rose from his seat, and began to pace up and down the verandah with hasty strides.

"It is too annoying," muttered he. "Every project that seems fair at first, displays some flaw when I go into it carefully. Is there nothing to be done by which by one bold stroke I can restore my ruined fortunes and provide for my family?"

"Yes, sahib," answered the Ladâki, rising to his feet and speaking in a low tone, in which awe and conviction seemed to be struggling for the mastery. "No one has yet been able to find the Vanishing Diamond, and that once in your hands you may bid farewell to poverty and distress."

"The Vanishing Diamond!" repeated the tea-planter scornfully; "I have heard of that myth, for myth it is, before, but I have never met with any living man who has seen it."

"You have, sahib," answered Dhurrumdasa, calmly, "for your servant has seen it glistening and scintillating like a star in the heavens from the dark grey rock in which it is imbedded."

"You have seen this wonderful stone, Dhurrumdasa?" answered Macalpine, in some surprise. "Why, you never mentioned this to me before."

"What availed my doing so, when fortune and plenty were my master's slaves? But now that misfortune has closed around him, it is his servant's duty to neglect no means by which he can restore him to his former position."

"But, father," asked Donald, "what is the Vanishing Diamond? I do not remember to have heard anything about it before."

"That is strange, considering how fond you were of listening to all the quaint stories of which the hillmen possess so extensive a stock," answered Mr. Macalpine, with a smile.

"The hillmen do not think it lucky to speak of the enchanted stone," returned the Ladâki, solemnly; "but if the chota sahib (young master) would like to hear the legend, I will repeat it to him, as well as my own experiences regarding it."

"Oh, pray do," said Donald, eagerly, and Mr. Macalpine giving a nod of assent, Dhurrumdasa began his recital.

"I will speak in my own language," remarked he, "for both the sahib and the chota sahib understand it, and it is as well that the servants should not hear what I am saying. Many years ago, so far back that I cannot fix the date, the ruling monarch of Ladâki was the great warrior the Rajah Doolân, whose territories extended from the great salt lakes of Thibet to the realms Spiti and Sikkati Mundi. He was a severe and tyrannical monarch, and treated his subjects very harshly. He had discovered amongst some old books of prophecy that, in the range of basaltic rock that runs along the northern shore of the great salt lake of Thibet, a diamond of enormous size and unexampled lustre would be found during his reign, and hundreds of the poor villagers were torn from their homes and families and sent up to that bleak and inhospitable region beyond the perpetual snow to dig and delve for the priceless gem. After years of unremitting toil, during which hundreds of lives were lost and sacrificed to this cruel phantasy on the Rajah's part, the gem was discovered, and, strange to relate, glittering and lustrous as though it had just come from the lapidary's hands. Great joy filled the heart of Doolân, and he ordered all kinds of sumptuous feasts and rejoicings to celebrate his success, when the news was suddenly brought to him that the mighty freebooting chief, Kirghis Khan, with his myriads of Tartar horsemen, had entered his country, and was laying it waste with fire and sword. Whatever the faults of Doolân were, he was not deficient in courage, and hastily summoning his army, he advanced to meet the invader, and, as he arrogantly said, to sweep him off the face of the earth. But his men were no match for Kirghis Khan's sturdy horsemen, and after severe fighting his army was almost destroyed, and himself taken prisoner, opposite the range of basaltic rocks from which the Diamond had been so recently exhumed. When Doolân was led before his conqueror, the Tartar chief reproached him bitterly with the trouble and annoyance he had caused him. 'You have,' said he, 'wasted the time and spilt the blood of my men, and now tell me what compensation you are prepared to offer me?' His little bloodshot eyes gleamed viciously upon his captive, and his fingers played ominously with the iron hilt of his curved sabre as he spoke. All Rajah Doolân's courage and assurance fled. 'Spare me, mighty chief,' cried he, throwing himself upon his face before the Tartar. 'I will give you all I possess, my lands, cities, palaces, and subjects, only spare my life.'

"'Are not all these mine already by right of the sword, foolish man?' returned the hardy horseman. 'If you have no more to offer, I had better rid the earth of a weak-minded tyrant. Ho, there, cover his face, and lead him out to the death.'

"'Nay, nay, mighty Khan,' shrieked the Rajah in the extremity of his anguish; 'I have yet something that may be worthy of your highness's acceptance,' and searching in his bosom he produced the fatal diamond.

"The Tartar gazed upon it curiously, and turned it contemptuously from one hand to the other.

"'And do you think,' asked he, 'that this glittering crystal is worth the expenditure of so many brave men's lives?—not to mention your own subjects, whom, I am informed, died off by thousands through the hardships of the quest.'

"'Certainly it is,' answered Rajah Doolân, eagerly. 'And had I to do the thing again, I would once more begin the search to become the possessor of so priceless a gem.'

"'You have spoken your doom,' returned the Tartar. 'Take this bauble,' he added, turning to one of his principal attendants, 'and pile over it again the mountain from whose entrails it has been reft. Then tear out the eyes of this senseless fool, who places the possession of a gem above all other earthly happiness; and when he has found it again, I will restore to him his wide-spreading domains, which are now mine by right of conquest.'

"This horrible command," continued Dhurrumdasa, after a short pause, "was at once executed, but the unhappy Rajah did not long endure his misery and degradation. The next morning he was found a battered and disfigured corpse at the foot of the pinnacle of rock upon which he had been placed to commence his work, by order of the Tartar chieftain, and for some years Kirghis Khan reigned over the broad lands of the dead Doolân."

"But the diamond; why was it called the Invisible Diamond?" asked Donald, as the Ladâki again came to a pause.

"The legend is, replied the man, that on the anniversary of Rajah Doolân's death, for several hours the diamond sparkles and scintillates in the face of the rock in which it is imbedded, and is then at the disposal of the adventurous spirit who dares to penetrate into that horrible region where all is black and bare, where the winter winds whistle all the year round, and where the water is so brackish that even the thirsty wayfarer turns from it with disgust."

"It is a strange story," remarked Mr. Macalpine, thoughtfully; "but one portion of it is still wanting. You said that you yourself had seen this precious gem. How was it that if such was the case, you were not able to make it your own property?"

"Ah, sahib," answered the Ladâki, "I fear that my uneducated intellect has prevented my explaining to you the terrible difficulties that stand in the way of securing this coveted gem. The hideous climate, the savage beasts, the fatigue and privations that have to be endured, and last, but not least, the comparatively brief space for which the gem shows itself and then disappears again for another twelve months."

"Well, tell us all about it, at any rate," said Donald.

"Your servant obeys," replied the man, and again began his recital.

CHAPTER III.

DHURRUMDASA'S ADVENTURE.

"WHEN I was very much younger than I now am, sahib," commenced the Ladâki, "this strange legend of the diamond had been repeated to me, and my imagination had been fired by the wondrous accounts of its lustre and value. I had found out the exact date upon which the unhappy Doolân had been blinded, by the orders of his merciless conqueror the Tartar chief—it was the twelfth day of what you English call the month of November, and to any one who is acquainted with the terrible climate of the region in which the basaltic range of hills is situated where the diamond is reported to show itself, will understand how terrible are the dangers to be incurred in the search for it.

"The thought of these dangers, however, did not daunt me, I had been too long accustomed to track the mountain bear to his haunt, and to pursue the wild sheep along the dizzy height, to fear the perils of mountain life, and slinging my matchlock over my shoulder, and taking a pack containing a blanket and provisions, I set out for the great salt lakes of Thibet.

"It was a long and toilsome journey, but the day before the appointed time for the appearance of the diamond, I arrived upon the shores of the lake. The journey had been a hard one, and I had experienced many dangers and perils from the

climate with which I need not weary you, and I was gaunt and famished like a wolf when I arrived at my journey's end.

"The great black range of rocky hills rose up bare and threatening against the dark, leaden sky, and the wind every now and then swept over the face of the landscape bearing with it thick clouds of snow. Choosing as sheltered a position as I could, I contrived to kindle a fire, and made myself some *chupatties* (unleavened cakes), from the little stock of flour which I had brought with me, for I was faint and weary with my long tramp. After making a hearty meal, I wrapped my blanket round me, and creeping as close to the fire as I could, I lay down to sleep. When I awoke the daylight had fled, and darkness reigned around, with not a single star to be seen through the obscurity. Not a star, do I say?—I am wrong, for straight in front of me was a dazzling object seemingly some eighty feet from the ground, which cast forth rays of almost bewildering brilliance. For a time I gazed stupidly upon this strange phenomenon, when suddenly the idea flashed across my mind that the lost diamond of Rajah Doolân was before my eyes. Yes, there it was twinkling and scintillating in all its pure effulgence, but as far beyond my reach as if it had its resting place in the heavens above me. The spot in which the diamond showed itself was totally inaccessible from beneath, and to this day I cannot see how it can be reached; but the fact is that the diamond is there, for I have seen it with my own eyes."

The Ladâki ceased his narrative, and gazed upon the father and son.

"This is a strange recital of yours, Dhurrumdasa," remarked Mr. Macalpine. "Why did you not mention this before?"

"I did once, sahib," answered the man; "do you not recollect that I told you in the presence of your half-caste clerk Andrew De Cruz that I had seen the diamond?"

"Ah, now I recollect your doing so," replied the tea-planter. "It was the very day upon which I dismissed that scoundrel for robbing me."

"That was the day, sahib," replied the Ladâki; "and pray have a care, for that man will do you an ill turn if ever it is in his power to do so."

"And did the diamond disappear at the end of the twelve hours?" asked Donald.

"Sahib, it did," answered Dhurrumdasa, "at the end of the appointed time it disappeared as suddenly as it had blazed out. But the next morning the face of the rock was as dark and

blank as ever. Feeling the uselessness of remaining any longer in that terrible region, I made the best of my way home, and for many years dismissed the fatal diamond from my thoughts."

"Did you ever hear what this stone was said to be worth?" asked Mr. Macalpine.

"The old legend stated that its value was twelve lacs of rupees," answered the man.

"Twelve lacs!" exclaimed Donald. "Why, father, a lac of rupees is ten thousand pounds; if we could get hold of the diamond, neither mother nor you need fret about our future."

"I should think not," answered his father, with a smile; "but remember the old proverb, 'first catch your hare'—in this case your diamond."

"The diamond can be secured," answered Dhurrumdasa, decidedly. "It exists, and I have the exact locality; but one thing I am certain of, and that is, that no one can hope to secure it alone and unaided. The horror and desolation of that terrible region are enough to chill the stoutest heart, but with company, and assisted by trustworthy counsel and advice, there is no more difficulty in securing it than wresting any of nature's products from their place of concealment."

"It is a strange story," repeated Mr. Macalpine again, "and yet I remember that at home in Scotland there was a similar legend of a vanishing stone which showed itself in the Perthshire hills, and was secured by a stout-hearted sword-maker of Banff, who watched for it and marked the exact spot by firing a bullet of chalk against the face of the rock."

"What a splendid dodge!" exclaimed Donald, with a burst of laughter. "What a pity you did not load up this old matchlock of yours with pipeclay and set your mark on the spot once and for ever!"

With the customary solemnity of his race, no smile played on the features of the Ladâki at the boy's jest, and he merely gazed upon his master in expectant silence.

"It would certainly be a magnificent prize," said Mr. Macalpine, "but I confess that I do not see my way at present."

"Sahib," returned the Ladâki, impressively, "nothing is to be obtained without trouble—that is if it is worth having. One thing, however, is certain, and that is that, as the proverb says, 'the finger of discretion must be placed upon the lip of silence,' for if it were once known that we had gone off in such a quest, we should be followed by those who would have but little reluctance in depriving us not only of our treasure, but of our lives into the bargain."

"How do you purpose, then, that we should set about the matter?" asked the tea-planter.

"When the Mem Sahib and the Missie Baba have departed for their homes across the Black Water," answered the Ladâki, "let the sahib give out that he is going on a trading expedition into Tartary and Thibet. We can convey with us a small selection of merchandise, and trade in a small way as we go along, and that will serve as an excuse for our passing through regions inhabited by fierce and warlike tribes who gaze with suspicion upon any strangers who come within the boundaries of their territories."

"But," objected Donald, "surely they will never believe in white gentlemen acting as travelling pedlars."

"The chota sahib is quite right," returned the Ladâki, gazing upon the fresh open countenance of the boy with an expression of deep admiration; "but both you, sahib, and he must adopt the dress of Mussalmân merchants, and as you both speak the various native dialects with fluency, this will be no difficult task."

"Oh, that will be jolly!" cried Donald, clapping his hands. "Father, how shall I look as a Mahomedan shop-boy?"

"Dhurrumdasa," said Mr. Macalpine, after a few moments of deep reflection, "a desperate man must not shrink from any means to retrieve his ruined fortunes. As soon as Mrs. Macalpine and Eva have sailed, we will start—that is if you care to join us in our perilous search."

"Dhurrumdasa, sahib, will never leave the kind master who has treated him as a friend, and also in addition has opened to him the Book of Light," returned the Ladâki in tones of the deepest feeling.

"Very well, then the matter is settled," returned the tea-planter. "Mrs. Macalpine will leave in a fortnight; do you, Dhurrumdasa, in that time get together such a stock of goods as will give some colour to our pretended business—but remember, not a word of our intentions to my wife and daughter, for not for all the diamonds in the world would I add in the slightest manner to their anxiety."

"Nor to any one else, sahib," cried the Ladâki, earnestly, "for a single slip of the tongue may place our heads in jeopardy."

"Remember what Dhurrumdasa says, Donald," remarked Mr. Macalpine, turning to his son. "From to-day you are going to play a man's part, and must cast aside all boyish indiscretions.—Well, what do you want, Khooda Buhsh?"

added he, as a Mahomedan servant entered the verandah and stood respectfully before his master.

"The sahib De Cruz wishes to see the sahib, and has been waiting some half an hour, but at last he got up from the room where I had asked him to sit down and told me to tell you that he would wait no longer as he had learned all that he desired," answered the man, and with a deep salaam he left the verandah. The tea-planter and Dhurrumdasa gazed into each other's faces with an expression of deep dismay.

"How fortunate that we were speaking in your language, of which he knows nothing," remarked Mr. Macalpine.

"I do not know," returned Dhurrumdasa, discontentedly; "these half-castes are as cunning as foxes, and we never know what they know or what they are ignorant of."

"Well, if mischief has been done, it is too late to remedy it now," said the tea-planter, "and all that we can do is to hope for the best; besides, after all, what harm can the fellow do?"

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE VERGE OF THE SNOW.

FAR away in the interior of the giant Himalayas, where the pines become rare and the other vegetation becomes scantier and is scattered about in sparse clumps—the region, in fact, where the sun seems to have lost its power and the perpetual snow commences—was a small encampment pitched under the shelter of the many huge boulders which crop out of the bare hillside. It consisted of three small tents, near which were tethered a dozen mules enjoying a comfortable meal from their leathern *tobras* (nose-bags), whilst the packs which composed their loads were piled up in symmetrical order at the doors of the canvas habitations. A couple of dozen of sturdy mountaineers armed with matchlock, shield, and tulwar were squatted round a fire enjoying the narcotic fumes from a chillyen which was passed rapidly round from hand to hand. Dhurrumdasa, who appeared to be in command of the little party, had ascended to the summit of a tall pinnacle of rock from whence a good view of the surrounding country could be obtained, and, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed eagerly in the direction of the south as though in search of some object which was not at present

visible. For a long time he remained in the same position, and at length with a sigh of relief he descended from his post of observation, and hastening to the little camp, issued some orders to the men, who at once began to busy themselves in making various little improvements in the appearance of the resting-place. In about a quarter of an hour's time the sharp clatter of horse hoofs was heard on the stony road, and two horsemen rode into the camp. One was a tall, handsome man with a grey beard descending almost to his waist, whilst his companion was a youth of about seventeen summers. Both were heavily armed and attired in a picturesque native costume, and rode the stout hill galloways known as ghoonts in the mountain districts. Dhurrumdasa hastened up to the new arrivals, and with many demonstrations of respect assisted them to alight and led them into the largest of the tents, whilst two of the attendants led away the horses and looked after their refreshment, which they evidently needed, for their appearance showed that their journey had been a long and toilsome one.

"And so, sahibs, you have arrived at last," said the Ladâki; "and right glad am I to see you, for the men began to wonder and complain at the long delay in this dreary region."

"We came as soon as we could, my good Dhurrumdasa," answered Mr. Macalpine—for as it has no doubt been guessed, the travellers were the tea-planter and his son—"but we have been obliged to take many precautions, and have succeeded in leaving no trace behind us."

"Heaven grant it!" returned the Ladâki; "but you must be tired after your long ride, and I have refreshments ready for you."

Both father and son did ample justice to the simple meal of boiled kid's flesh and rice which smoked in a large earthen platter. As soon as the pangs of hunger were satisfied, Mr. Macalpine turned to the faithful Ladâki and observed:

"I suppose everything is ready for the start."

"Yes, sahib," returned the man; "the men consider that they have been engaged for the protection of some merchants, and are of course quite ignorant of the real object of our expedition."

"It is well," said Mr. Macalpine, rising to his feet; "and now, Donald, listen to me. From this moment forget the English language. There must be nothing about us to create the slightest suspicion that we are not what we represent ourselves to be. Dhurrumdasa, I shall give all my orders to the men through you, and shall keep aloof from them as much as

possible under the pretext that I am absorbed in my mercantile calculations."

"I think that you are acting wisely, sahib," returned the Ladâki; "and now shall we begin to make a start, for we ought to camp at the foot of the snowy range by this evening. The passes are all open, and we shall soon reach the table-lands of Thibet. When we have done so, we must proceed carefully from town to village exposing our goods for sale, until we get near the desired spot, and then we must act according to circumstances."

"Very good," answered Mr. Macalpine; "give the orders to strike the camp, pack the mules and set forth. In an hour I suppose we shall be ready to make a move."

Dhurrumdasa left the tent, and in a few moments the little camp was a scene of the most intense activity. The air was full of the sounds of the mallets striking upon the tent pegs, of the strange groaning noise the mules utter as their pack-saddles are adjusted, and the shrill exclamations of the natives as they hurried to and fro in the fulfilment of their several tasks. Donald Macalpine stood a little apart, gazing upon the scene of activity, his heart bounding within him at the prospect of the life of adventure that was opening before him, and his imagination filled with bright visions of future success. At length all was ready, and at a signal from Dhurrumdasa the train of mules started, with the men scattered irregularly by their flanks, whilst the merchant and his son prepared to bring up the rear. They had proceeded in this way for some quarter of a mile, when the road suddenly narrowed and the masses of rock which rose upon each side seemed to form a species of natural doorway. As the leading mule approached within a few feet of this it suddenly came to a halt with a loud snort of terror, for a strange figure appeared as suddenly as if it had risen from the earth, and barred the passage of the caravan. The figure was one that might well impress the dumb brute with terror. It was that of a tall, slender man, whose dark countenance and opal-hued eyes showed that he belonged to the community of Eurasians or half-castes. As for his features, nothing could be traced in them, save a perfect embodiment of all evil passions. The black elf-locks which hung over his neck and shoulders were encircled by a dingy grey turban, whilst a sheep-skin *chupkan* (loose coat) descended almost to the ground. He wore a broad leathern belt, from which hung a revolver and a long knife, whilst a short carbine was slung across his shoulders.

"Halt!" said this strange figure, striking the ground with a heavily-shod staff, which made the leading mule turn back its ears and show its teeth viciously. "Halt! I have a word to say to you all before you go further."

"It is Andrew De Cruz, the villain," muttered Mr. Macalpine. "The scoundrel must have heard everything, and followed us here to carry out the plan of vengeance that he formed against me."

"The rogue deserves a sound horsewhipping," said Donald, with a frown, as he raised his riding-rod and prepared to urge his pony towards the intruder.

"Stop, my boy!" said his father, laying his hand upon his son's bridle. "Listen! Dhurrumdasa is speaking to him."

The Ladâki had in fact thrown himself from his pony, and pushing his way through the mules, was now standing in front of the half-caste. There was an antipathy of long standing between the men, and with a bitter sneer the half-caste commenced:

"Well met, most Christian Dhurrumdasa! So you, too, form part of this paid expedition that is going to steal a diamond to bolster up the fortunes of a ruined tea-planter; but do not think you are going to have it all your own way. No, not whilst I, Andrew De Cruz, can stir hand or foot to prevent your doing so. I will soon put an end to all these great projects for future wealth and fortune. That hound Macalpine, who is sneaking in the rear in disguise, and is afraid to venture up to confront me, once had me turned from his door in disgrace, because, forsooth, I had made a mistake about a few paltry rupees; and now it is my turn."

Up to this time the conversation had been carried on in English, but now the half-caste, raising his voice, spoke in a dialect which the men would understand.

"Listen to me, you poor besotted fools!" cried he. "You are being led you know not where. You think that you are escorting the goods of some honest Mussulman merchants; whereas you are the dupes of an old rogue of a Scotchman and his cub of a son dressed up in some mountebank disguise. You think you are going on a legitimate trading expedition, whereas you are being taken into a wild and desolate region full of *ghouls* (ghosts) and evil spirits, and those of you who are not devoured by them will perish of cold and hunger."

"Andrew De Cruz," said the Ladâki, taking a step back and raising his long matchlock to his hip, as the half-caste paused

from want of breath, "I warn you that you are playing a dangerous game. Have a care."

"Have a care yourself, vile apostate from the religion of Bhudda!" screamed the angry man. "I tell you, men, that you are going in search of the Vanishing Diamond—that stone which has cost so many brave fellows their lives. Are you, I ask, going to be fools enough to let your bones whiten in the black rocks which fringe the great salt lake of Thibet?"

"Andrew De Cruz," repeated the Ladâki yet more solemnly, "I am a Christian man, but I owe a duty to my employer, and I have ever been faithful to those whose salt I have eaten; leave this idle talk, or I tell you it will be the worse for you."

"But you will not succeed even in getting so far as that," continued the half-caste. "See, the demons of the hills are already casting down their mantles to blind your eyes and to make your footsteps stumble."

As he spoke one of those sudden grey mists so common in the hills rose up on all sides, and for a few seconds enveloped the whole party. Then there was a confused sound of tramping feet and angry exclamation, and a half-strangled appeal for mercy—and then silence. Suddenly the sun broke out in all its brilliancy, the mist cleared away as if by magic, and disclosed the Ladâki standing alone. His swarthy complexion had paled a little: he was breathing heavily, and the blood was streaming from a recent cut across his right wrist; but the half-caste was nowhere to be seen.

"Men," said the Ladâki, turning towards the escort who were huddled together and whispering in low tones, "you have no more cause for fear. The creature was one of the demons of the hills, but by the aid of a precious charm that I possess I disclosed him and made him flee to his hiding-place at the foot of the *khud* (precipice). See how he tore me with his sharp claws before he would yield to the power of my spell."

"As he spoke he raised his bleeding wrist in the air; then beckoning one of the men to bring up his pony, he vaulted into the saddle, and putting himself at the head of the cavalcade, led the way, whilst the men, inspirited by his words and deed, with a faint cheer followed his example. As Mr. Macalpine and his son—who had taken no part in this scene—passed the spot from whence the half-caste had disappeared, the former, who cast his eyes down the precipice at the side of the road, fancied he could perceive upon a holly tree that projected from the rocks some hundred and fifty feet below, something fluttering, which looked like the torn fragments of a

sheepskin coat. No further remark upon the day's occurrence was then, however, made, and after a long day's march the little troop arrived at a small village at the foot of one of the passes where Dhurrumdasa had arranged to camp for the night.

CHAPTER V.

EASTERN SHOPKEEPING.

When the camp had been pitched, and every arrangement made for a regular watch being kept during the night, Dhurrumdasa entered the tent which had been set apart for the accommodation of the supposed merchant and his son.

"My good fellow," exclaimed Mr. Macalpine, rising from a heap of rugs upon which he had been reclining, "I have been so anxious to hear what took place this morning. All happened so suddenly that I had not time to interfere, and I know the native character too well to say a word after you had succeeded in calming the doubts and hesitation of the men."

"Sahib," answered the Ladâki, gravely, "I fear that I may have committed an act for which no possible excuse can be alleged, and yet, after all, what I did was in self-defence. I felt that if De Cruz was allowed to gain the ear of the men any further, they would turn back and decline to carry out the terms of their agreement. At the moment that the mist closed round us I stepped up to him, and placing my hand upon his lips, sternly bade him to be silent, upon the peril of his life. I think that he misunderstood my intention, and feared that his life was in peril, for he struggled fiercely, and drawing his knife slashed me over the wrist. Then my temper gave way, and raising him up in my arms I hurled him from me into the mist. We were close to the edge of the precipice, and I fear that the poor wretch must have gone unexpectedly to his account."

"You could not help yourself, Dhurrumdasa," returned the merchant, "the villain would not have hesitated to have stabbed you; as it is, he will do no more mischief. Is the cut he gave you a severe one?"

The Ladâki shrugged his shoulders. "Do not worry about that, sahib," answered he; "a dozen more or less like that would not hurt me," returned he. "But I have bad news to give you—we shall not be able to move to-morrow, for the

Thakoor who rules this district has sent his *Vakeel* (messenger) to say that he wishes to see our merchandise."

"What a nuisance the fellow is," exclaimed Donald; "as if we want to sell our goods like common pedlars! Why, if we go on like this we shall have got through all the stock before we are half-way on our journey."

"Remember we must keep up appearances," said his father; "but you are right in a certain sense, and we must put almost a prohibitory price upon our goods, or we shall soon have only empty bales for the mules to carry."

"You will see the Vakeel, sahib?" remarked the Ladâki. 'It will be necessary to give him a small present in order that he may make things pleasant for us with his master the Thakoor."

"Ah, well," remarked Mr. Macalpine, shrugging his shoulders with an air of resignation, "have the fellow in, and let us get over the business as soon as possible."

In a few minutes the Thakoor's Vakeel was ushered into the tent. He was a little, slender old man, with a cunning face and a long grey beard. He took his seat with an air of great nonchalance, and after a few curt civilities at once plunged into business.

"His Highness the Thakoor Sahib," began the accredited envoy, "having heard that some strange merchants have entered his dominions, has sent his servant to purchase such of their goods as may suit his requirements."

"His Highness does us too much honour," answered Mr. Macalpine, "and may his reign be a long and happy one. What sort of articles does the Great Prince require?"

"All sorts," returned the man coolly. "But first let me see what little trifles you have set aside for my acceptance in reporting favourably of your wares to the Thakoor."

"You are quite right, most courtly Vakeel," answered Mr. Macalpine, giving his son a nudge, who was gazing open-mouthed at what he looked upon as a barefaced attempt at robbery. "Here are two magnificent crimson blankets, a piece of the finest muslin from the looms of Dacca, silk from Surat for *pyjamas*, and a magnificent knife, with fourteen blades, from the royal city of Birmingham, made by her Majesty the Queen's own private cutler."

"It is well," returned the Vakeel, gazing with but scant satisfaction at the goods which the supposed merchant placed before him. "This will do for the present; you can look out some more little trifles later on."

Disgusted as Mr. Macalpine was at the man's rapacity, he knew that there was no use in manifesting any sign of dissatisfaction, and accordingly a few more articles were added to the heap which had already begun to accumulate in front of the Vakeel, and the man's countenance began to exhibit some slight appearance of satisfaction.

"I will go and give a favourable account of you to his Highness the Thakoor," said he, as, stepping to the door of the tent, he beckoned to his men who had accompanied him, and gave them his plunder. "In an hour," continued he, "his Highness will be here. Have your goods displayed, and remember that he is a great prince, and must not be treated as a mere creature of earth such as we are; but fear not, I will stand your friend, especially if you look me out a nice piece of jasmine-coloured silk to make a *sciah* (dress) for my little girl."

With a nod of assurance he slipped away, leaving the three surprised at his enviable audacity. In the course of the afternoon the great man himself made his appearance. He was a sullen-looking young man of exceedingly indolent demeanour, and rode into the camp accompanied by a dozen tatterdemalions armed with spears and matchlocks, and imperiously demanded an immediate sight of all the goods the merchants had with them. By the advice of Dhurrumdasa, however, only a small selection was displayed, but with these he appeared to be perfectly satisfied, and at once purchased the lot without any haggling as to price or attempt at beating down. The purchase having been completed he unbent a little, and a hookah having been brought to him by one of his attendants, he absolutely condescended to hold a little conversation with Mr. Macalpine.

"Have you seen the Lord Sahib lately?"—under which title he alluded to the Governor-General of India.

"Your servant saw him some two months ago," returned the pretended merchant; "he is much occupied with affairs of state."

"Naturally," answered the Thakoor. "Some three years ago I sent in an *utzu* (petition) regarding nearly a quarter of a mile of my country which I allege is being unjustly held by a neighbouring Rana, and doubtless the Lord Sahib has been engaged in considering the matter during that time."

"Your Highness is certainly right," returned Mr. Macalpine, hardly able to repress a smile at the young man's self-sufficient arrogance.

"Well, let us hope that he will do me justice," continued

the Thakoor, "for I should be very sorry to embroil myself with your government; but of course the Lord Sahib will see the importance of the question and endeavour to conciliate me."

"But by doing so he might make an enemy of the Rana, your adversary," remarked Donald, who could not refrain from a sneer.

"Silence, boy!" returned the Thakoor, haughtily. "A youth of your years should learn to sit quiet in the presence of his superiors and elders. Should the Rana display any hostility to the English raj (government), I would prevent it."

Fortunately this speech closed the conversation, otherwise Mr. Macalpine and Donald would have been unable to retain their gravity. Before leaving, however, the Vakeel whispered to Mr. Macalpine that he would come over the next morning and settle about purchases that had been made. Accordingly the next day the baggage was all packed, although the tents were left standing, and the Thakoor's messenger was waited for with some degree of expectation. At length the Vakeel cantered up, and arrogantly demanded to see the head merchant. As soon as Mr. Macalpine made his appearance, the Vakeel broke out, "The Thakoor says that you are to leave his country at once, and that he will not charge you any of the usual dues for bringing goods through his territories."

"I thank his Highness for his permission," returned Mr. Macalpine, politely. "May I ask if you have come to pay the Thakoor's little account?"

"Pay!" returned the Vakeel, scornfully, "the Thakoor never pays anybody. If you are not out of the country in six hours you will be fined five hundred rupees," and striking the pony's sides he cantered away.

"Well," remarked Mr. Macalpine, calmly, "the first loss is the best, and thank goodness a quarter of an hour's walk will take us over his Highness's boundary, so we need not fret about the time he has allowed us."

"Father," exclaimed Donald, his eyes gleaming with merriment, "may I not parody the words of the general after his success, and say that 'One other such financial transaction will be the ruin of the firm!' Do you not think that for the future we had better announce that we are willing to do business with all the world except Thakoors and Vakeels?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

THE camp was soon struck, and the little party moved out of the territories of the inhospitable Thakoor. The men of the escort laughed at the trick that had been played upon their employer, for, as they had no interest in the business, they cared but little whether he got money for his goods or not. The three days' journey through the snowy passes was, if tiresome and frequently lonely, uneventful, and all the members of the little caravan hailed with delight the broad tablelands of Thibet, which met their view as they turned their backs upon the regions of perpetual whiteness.

"But where are the towns and cities?" asked Donald, gazing in surprise at the trackless plains which surrounded them like some vast ocean. "It seems to me as if we had reached that part of the world which was utterly devoid of inhabitants."

The Ladâki smiled, and, laying his hand tenderly on the boy's shoulder, pointed to a spot some half a mile in a southerly direction.

"You will find plenty of inhabitants there," remarked he.

Donald gazed long and earnestly, and at length managed to distinguish a few faint circles of smoke issuing from the ground, and turned to Dhurrumdasa with a look of inquiry upon his face.

"Did you not know," said the man, "that the inhabitants of Thibet have a fondness for underground dwellings, and have in some instances hollowed out quite extensive ranges of galleries in which they spend a large portion of their time? They are, however, careful enough to keep trusty watchmen above ground, and our camp will not long remain unvisited by them."

Dhurrumdasa's prognostications did not long remain unverified, and in the course of an hour or two the little camp was surrounded by some two or three hundred rather diminutive beings with strongly-marked Calmuck features, offering various articles of home manufacture for sale and clamouring for news. It appeared from the head man of the village that at first they had been afraid to venture near the camp, as they feared it might be that of Kara Kaplân, a much dreaded robber chief, who, with a strong and well-armed band, made periodical incursions into this part of the country, and whose cruelty and

rapacity had made his name an object of terror to nearly all the smaller towns and villages of Thibet.

What interested Donald, however, more than the intelligence regarding the robber chief, was the news that a flock of the large mountain sheep (Ovis Ammon) had been seen in the immediate vicinity, and with his father's permission he prepared to accompany the native hunter who had marked down the herd. In a very few minutes all his preparations were complete, and with his rifle slung over his shoulder, and followed by a couple of the escort, he accompanied his guide across the wide plains to some low rising ground about three miles distant. The native hunter led Donald to a sort of rifle-pit that had been scooped out, and whispering to him to remain perfectly still and that he would take a long circuit and drive the sheep towards him, made off at a slow trot, followed by the men of the camp. There was a long and weary wait for Donald whilst the hunter was away, and the boy gazed around at the dreary and uninteresting scene, a wide extent of brown plain without a single tree to break the monotony. Above the clear blue sky and far up in it could be described the dark shapes of huge vultures which were seen floating about far away in the airy regions of space, whilst far away the snowy white of the perpetual snow gleamed and glistened in the rays of the sun. Long and wearily the boy waited, until at length he perceived a small cloud of dust rising some eight hundred yards off, and in a few minutes a flock of mountain sheep came tearing along, their great horns rattling against each other, and led by a grizzled old patriarch with a long beard. Donald concealed himself as best he could in his hiding-place, and cocking both barrels of his rifle, waited until he could get a side shot. In another instant the flock passed within eighty yards of him, and taking a steady aim he fired. The sound of the report only seemed to increase the speed of the frightened animals, but the boy was certain that his shot had taken effect, and after a couple of hundred more yards had been passed over one of the animal's rapid pace subsided into a short staggering walk, and in another moment it fell over on its side.

Leaving his rifle at his hiding-place, Donald sprang towards the spot where the creature was breathing out its life. As he was drawing his knife to put an end to the animal's pain, a dark shadow fell across him and he felt his shoulder grasped with a clutch of iron. In utter surprise the boy looked up and met the savage face of the half-caste De Cruz gazing into his.

"So, you young spawn of the old serpent," growled the man,

"I have got you alone at last, have I? Now I can satisfy the grudge I owe to your father for driving me out of his house and service. I do not think he would care much to go in his search for the diamond if he found his dear beloved son stretched on the plains of Thibet with his throat cut from ear to ear, and his eyes picked out by the vultures."

"You villain!" cried the boy, springing to his feet, and standing on the defensive with his hunting-knife; "you will have something to do before you cut my throat, I can tell you."

"Perhaps so," returned the half-caste, as with a bitter sneer he hastily moved between Donald and the spot where the latter had left his rifle. "I suppose you thought that your new-found friend Dhurrumdasa had hurled me into eternity in the mist. Not a bit of it, for when I saw that neither the rigidly moral Mr. Macalpine or his truly Christian henchman Dhurrumdasa were disposed to hesitate at murder, I first slashed the latter over the wrist and slipped into a little hiding-place I had in the rocks, and threw my sheepskin coat down the *khud* (precipice) and so hoodwinked all your blundering eyes. Ha, ha! you will have to rise early in the morning to catch Andrew De Cruz asleep!"

"I know nothing about that," returned the boy undauntedly, "but this I do know, and that is that in ten minutes' time I shall have friends round me who will prevent you carrying any of your absurd threats into execution. I know you, Andrew De Cruz, and all the vain brag of your class. Cunning you may be, but you have not even the courage to come to close quarters with me, though you have a double-barrelled carbine and I have only a hunting-knife."

"There is no occasion," returned the half-caste composedly, "I can cut your throat after you are dead, so as to add to the horror your father will experience at finding your body so brutally disfigured; and as you say that you have help at hand I may as well get to work at once."

Stepping a pace or two back as he spoke, the half-caste cocked and levelled his carbine. The deadly tubes gleamed within ten feet of the English boy's heart, and the cruel eyes that glanced along them showed no signs of relenting. Donald's cheek grew a little shade paler, but he maintained his position firmly, determining, if not disabled by the first shot, to make a dash at his cowardly assassin. His fate seemed inevitable, but at that moment a couple of sharp cracks of matchlocks were heard, and with a bitter curse the half-caste

spun half round, his carbine exploding harmlessly as he did so, whilst the blood streamed from a wound just above the elbow. Mechanically the boy glanced in the direction from which the succour had come, and saw the two men of the escort with the matchlocks still smoking from their recent discharge, whilst the native hunter was kneeling down pointing his long weapon full in the direction of the half-caste. De Cruz's eyes glanced in the same direction, and with a howl of terror he clapped his hand to his wounded arm and sped away across the plains at a speed that defied pursuit.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRIEST OF THE BHOOTS.

When Mr. Macalpine heard of the dastardly attempt of De Cruz, and that the half-caste was still at liberty to carry out his murderous plots, he was both enraged and alarmed. Dhurrumdasa and half a dozen of the escort, mounted upon mules and ponies, set out to search for the fugitive, and scoured the plains for many miles without success, for the half-caste seemed to have disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up. Wearied and dispirited, they returned late to camp with the report of the failure of their mission. Although Mr. Macalpine had determined to halt for two or three days to enable both men and beasts to recover from the fatigues of their passage through the snowy passes, he now made up his mind to linger no longer in so dangerous a locality, and accordingly moved off with the first beams of the sun, and by the fall of night had placed some twenty miles between himself and his last halting-place. Some fifty yards from the site selected for a camp were a number of dome-shaped tombs, the monument of some dead and gone Tartar tribe, with a tall half-ruined tower standing in the midst. Many such deserted villages of the dead are to be found in the trackless plains of Thibet and Chinese Tartary, and no other trace of the celebrities whose valiant deeds they were raised to commemorate, remains. The escort, who had an unconquerable dread of these weird localities as the abode of *bhoots* and *ghouls* (ghosts and cannibal spirits), did not attempt to

venture near the tombs; but Mr. Macalpine and his son, after they had partaken of their evening meal, shouldered their rifles and walked across to the ruins to see if there were any ancient inscriptions upon the various slabs that were seen to be scattered about. Just as they reached the foot of the mound upon which the ruined tower stood, a series of wild and unearthly yells broke through the still night air and caused both father and son to come to a dead halt and glance to see if their rifles were ready for immediate use. Again and again the yells and cries were repeated, and a number of hawks and owls flew out of the edifice and circled wildly around, adding to the uproar with their harsh discordant notes and the rapid flapping of their wings.

The other unearthly sounds had by this time ceased, and Mr. Macalpine and Donald again made a move to reach the foot of the tower. Suddenly from a low archway in the side of it a hideous and indescribable creature came out at a swift pace upon all-fours, and then, with another wild and discordant howl, raised itself into an erect position, and for a moment or two remained motionless before the intruders. The appearance of the apparition was one which could not fail to command immediate attention: tall and with hardly an atom of superfluous flesh upon it, the body and limbs covered with a thick coating of grease and grey wood ashes, a shirt, or rather a deep girdle, composed of the feathers of the great vulture of the hills, whilst the hair, which was very long and dyed of a deep orange colour, was fantastically ornamented with a number of brass and steel rings. In its right hand this formidable creature bore a savage-looking club, the striking part of which was garnished with long iron spikes. For a moment the creature stood motionless, forming no inapt representative of the Guardian of the Tomb. Instinctively, Donald pressed closer to his father, who whispered to him to keep up his heart, for that this appalling creature was nothing but one of those religious monomaniacs who choose for their residences caves and sacred buildings, and who by the ascetism think to atone for the erroneousness of their belief. The figure once more uttered a series of appalling screams, and then, whirling its club round its head, advanced swiftly as though prepared to beat the intruders into the earth, but again came to an abrupt halt as the shining tubes of the rifles were levelled steadily against its face and chest.

"Halt!" said Mr. Macalpine sternly, addressing the figure in the Thibetan language. "We do not intend to do you any

harm, but we will submit to no violence. Lower your club; you know, I suppose, that with the weapons we carry we could strike you dead where you stand."

A strange contortion passed over the *yogi's* (holy man's) face, as in obedience to the stern command he allowed the spiked end of his mace to sink to the ground.

"What do you here?" growled he in strange accents, speaking not in the Thibetan, but the common Hindustani dialect of the Indian plains. "Why do you come here to disturb the priest of the *bhoot* and the *ghoul?* Will you not leave the dweller in the wilderness, whose abode is with the serpent, the crawling snake and venomous toad, in peace? Why am I to be disturbed by mere mortals—I, who consort but with the spirits of the mighty dead; I, who nightly see the dark shades arise from their sepulchres and dance grimly round as the blue phosphoric flames glimmer upon their fleshless bones? I, the communer with the dead, am no fit companion for the living. Away, I say, and leave Rabd al Hoosi, the Priest of the Spectre, to his own congregation."

All this string of words was poured out with the most intense volubility and accompanied by the wildest gestures and grimaces. Donald also had now recovered from his momentary panic, gazing with some curiosity not unmingled with amusement.

"Worthy Rabd al Hoosi," returned the pretended merchant, "we have no wish to intrude upon your most important duties. We have only come here to gaze upon the tombs of these most illustrious heroes of which you are so fitting a guardian."

"Who are you, I ask again?" growled the strange priest.

"Most worthy guardian of the tomb," remarked Donald, pushing forward, "we are the world-renowned merchants Mac al Pine, who have come from the uttermost parts of the world to trade with the wealthy noblemen of Thibet and Chinese Tartary."

A species of hysterical grunt, suspiciously resembling a suppressed laugh, issued from the lips of the priest, and after a short pause he said, in more civil accents:

"Follow me into the tower, O old and young traffickers in merchandise, and it may be that I can give you information which you are not expecting. Follow me, I say."

"Not so, most holy priest," answered the pretended merchant; "for the interesting subterranean hole out of which you came is most admirably constructed to enable you to dash out my brains if I were to venture into it on all-fours."

Again the same smile illuminated the face of the holy man, as he replied:

"You have no cause for fear; there is another and more commodious entrance to my abode through the lower story of the tower. Come with me, I beg."

Feeling that any further hesitation would be ascribed to timidity, Mr. Macalpine followed his strange conductor up the mound and through the broken doorway that led into the tower. A flight of uneven steps evidently formed the entrance to a vault, and the yogi, taking a torch from a niche in the wall, lighted it by the aid of a flint and steel, and led the way to the lower regions of the ruins. Closely followed by his son, the pretended merchant pressed upon the steps of his strange conductor, and in a few seconds found himself in a large vault, in which more attention had been paid to the comfort of the occupant than his strange exterior would have led the casual observer to expect. A roughly made table and chair stood in the centre, and on one side was a *charpoy* or native bedstead, with a neatly packed roll of comfortable blankets upon it. There were several earthen pots and copper cooking utensils in a row along the wall, whilst two native spears and a second formidable club stood in a corner. Without a word, the yogi went to a recess in one corner of the vault, and produced a small earthen jar, from which he filled two cups and handed one to each of his guests. The pungent odour of the liquid made Donald recoil from the proffered refreshment with disgust, but his father cautiously sipped the liquid, and with an exclamation of extreme surprise exclaimed:

"Whisky, I declare! Rather new, certainly; but veritable whisky. Pray, where did your reverence get this from?"

The holy man winked a most unmistakable wink, and filling up another cup for himself, tossed off the fiery fluid with apparent relish, and then, to the utter surprise of both father and son, commenced to speak in an entirely new dialect:

"Aweell, I canna restrain mesel' langer, my hale heart just gave a loup when I heard the kindly accents of my ain gude land, when ye cauld the young gentleman to stand firm. Aye, mon, ye canna tell what a thrill it sent through me to think that three kindly Scots should meet here, twa of them dressed up as heathen merchants, and the third as joost a priest of Satan, the great Rabd al Hoosi, or wild Rab Dalhousie, for as such he is kent at hame in gude auld Scotland by the links of Glenmutchkin. Aye, sirs, but it is a strange thing to meet brithers in a far-away land. Gie me a grip of your richt hands, and

ye will taste a wee drappie of the mountain dew, which I made with my ain hands, wish me a richt gude speed and a safe deliverance from the power of the evil one, in whose clutches I much fear I am the noo."

This extraordinary outburst, coming from the lips of so unlikely a figure, filled Mr. Macalpine and his son with the most intense surprise, and for a few moments they could do nothing but stare at the sham priest, whose eyes were now glistening with tears, though whether from the excitement of meeting his countrymen, or from the potency of his last draught, it is impossible to say.

"And so you are really a Scotchman," exclaimed Mr. Macalpine, as soon as he had partially recovered from the extreme surprise that this extraordinary revelation had caused him.

"Deed, sir, and I am," returned the Caledonian priest, sitting himself calmly on the edge of the table, "puir Rab Dalhousie, bred and born amangst the hills of Glenmutchkin, aince assistant to the dominie of that place, and afterwards a corporal in the gude auld regiment of Forfarshire Highlanders, which ye have no doubt heard did such gude service against the black brutes of sepoys before the walls of Delhi."

"It is strange, very strange indeed," murmured Mr. Macalpine; "and to think that we three Scotchmen should meet in this out-of-the-way portion of the world, each endeavouring as much as he possibly can to disguise his identity."

"If you have time to listen to my story," said the priest, I am thinking it will astonish you a wee bit more. There is no fear of our being disturbed, for the puir creatures hereabouts would never think of venturing near the Bhoots' Caves, as they call this place. Bhoot, as you know, signifies ghost or demon."

Mr. Macalpine and Donald nodded their heads to show that they understood the meaning of the word, and the priest, after placing Donald upon the bed and handing the chair to his father, sprang upon the table, on the top of which he squatted native fashion, and after taking a deep draught from his jar commenced his recital.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HISTORY OF A NE'ER-DO-WEEL.

"THE guidman my father held a small farm under Lord Auchienkill, and a sore time he had of it in getting together the rent by quarter day. Somehow he used to manage it, though it took nearly the whole of his time, and what little remained on his hands he used, I think, to devote wholly to my education, which he conducted chiefly with the aid of a sapling. I fear, sirs, that I was a wild slip of a lad, for though I was nae fule and could hold my own at the buiks with the best of the other laddies, yet it was not often that I chose to do so, and was always ready to slip away for a day's sport in the woods with his lordship's keepers, or a day's fishing with the miller doun by the spat side. I knew where to find a hare whenever one was wanted, could tell where every bird had its nest, and would take the Master of Glengono, who kept the otter-hounds, straight to the spot where he was sure to find a quarry. Eh, sirs, those were gey fine times, and I think I knew every idle loon in the country side. It seems to me the noo that I flung away mony a gude chance, and that had I stuck close to my buiks and gied my hale heart to what my gude auld father told me, I should not be living here in an outlandish country where they do not know the taste of whisky, hae ne'er got a glimpse o' the tartan, and are ignorant of the saft melody of the Hieland pipe. It is no use, however, in fashing myself wi' bygones. As I have made my bed so I must lie upon it. And I only hope that the young gentleman here will take a lesson frae my foolish doin's. Weel, one day the gudeman had me into an outlying byre, and after an hour's argument (with the aid of a stick) convinced me that it would be for my ain gude to take the place of assistant in the school of auld Dominie Craigie at Glenmutchkin.

"Aweel, I heaved a deep sigh as I took a last glance at the hills, the leaping trout, and the lavrock singing high up in the blue sky, and stooped my head under the dominie's select Academy of the Muses, as he was wont to designate the little cottage in which he collected his scholars together. I will na linger over those days, for they are na the happiest ones in my life, and mony and sair were the words the dominie and I had over what he called my neer-do-weelishness and feckless ways. At last, ane day as the laddies were pretending to be poring over

their lessons and the dominie was dozing over the peat fire, a blaw of the pipes came down the little street, a sound which made every Scottish heart leap up with wild glee. There was a casting aside of slates and buiks and a scramble for bonnets. Never heeding the dominie and his tawse, we tore out like mad things, and there was a bonny company of the Forfarshire Highlanders, with their pipes at their head, tramping down the street, the feathers of their bonnets and their belted plaids fluttering in the breeze, whilst their braw legs in the diced hose went merrily to the sound of the drone and chaunter—

"'The Campbell is good in a hurry,
The Gordon is sleuth to the bane,
The Kay and McKensie and Murray
And Cameron will hurckle to nane.
Wi' brogues, bonnets an a',
Wi' sword feather an a',
We'll up an gie em a blaw, a blaw
Wi' a hundred pipers an a' an a'.'

The men passed down the narrow street and halted in the market-place, where their billets were distributed to them. For the first time in my life I felt a thrill of desire for military glory, and forgetting all about the dominie's school, I went up to a bronzed old sergeant and asked him if I could be enlisted. I was then a stout young fellow of seventeen, but I looked fully two years older, and the sergeant gazed upon me with evident signs of approbation. He told me they were actually on recruiting service, and took me before his officer, who, however, would have nothing to do with me until he had seen my father. Deed, sirs, I shall never forget the gudeman's face when the officer, dressed in all the bravery of auld Scotia, bent his head to enter the doorway and told his errand. At first the old man was as stubborn as a Hieland stot, and swore that I should never join such a drinking and fighting set of sons of Satan as he believed the army to be composed of; but the officer talked him down, and so strongly urged that it would be a pity to balk a lad's inclinations for a life of glory, that at last, with a tear in his eye, the old man consented, and twelve hours afterwards I was a full private in Her Majesty's Forfar Highlanders. It was not such a life of ease and idleness; I found that it took nearly every minute of my time to learn my drill and keep my accoutrements in order, and that there was a good deal more confinement about the life than I cared for. However, I got on far better than I expected, and then the

Great Indian Mutiny just then breaking out, our regiment was ordered to the East to put down the murderous sepoys. I behaved so well on the voyage that I was made a lance-corporal, and I dare say that I should have risen still higher, but an unfortunate accident occurred that put an immediate close to my military career. After the mutiny had been quelled, our regiment was ordered up to a station in the Himalayan Hills, Dujstras by name, where the climate was very good—as a reward, I suppose, for the good service that the regiment had done. It was very healthy but deadly dull, and to add to our other discomforts our old colonel was ordered away home on sick leave. The officer commanding the depôt came out to take his place. He was a fat, podgy little man, with nothing Scotch about him but his name, and, never having seen a shot fired in anger, was a most humdrum martinet. All his delight was in drilling his men, and then punishing them for alleged shortcomings. Many were the tricks played upon him both by officers and men, by both of whom he was equally disliked, and in the last one I was unfortunately mixed up.

"During the temporary absence of the major's servant, his master's sword was taken away, and a wooden blade painted red substituted for the steel one. No one knew who were the chief actors in this foolish joke, for the secret was well kept. The next day was inspection, and as the general rode on to the parade-ground the major drew his sword and gave the command for a salute. I shall never forget his face of fury when he saw that he had been made the object of a practical joke, and as he caught a smile on my face, he had me at once made a prisoner and marched off to the guard-room, with the promise of being tried by court-martial immediately. Then, sirs, I did a right-down foolish thing. I managed to escape through a window in the back of my cell, and going to the barracks, which were quite empty owing to the inspection, helped myself to a suit of plain clothes belonging to one of the officer's servants, and made my way up to Simla and to the wild country beyond the snow. I had always a gift for languages, and so managed to get on pretty well; but at last I got tired of a life of semi-starvation, and joined the band of a noted robber called Kara Kaplân."

Mr. Macalpine and his son exchanged glances.

"Ah," remarked the Scotchman, "I see that you have heard of that bloodthirsty rover and robber, and if ever a man made a bargain with Satan it is Kara Kaplân.

"The sights and scenes that I have witnessed whilst I was

with his band were enough to punish me for any of the wrongs that I have committed during my boyhood, and if I had not had the good fortune to obtain my present appointment, I might have become as terrible a villain as Kara Kaplân himself."

"Is your position such a very good one, then?" asked Donald, who could hardly restrain a smile.

"Aye, ye are flying at me the noo, my lad," answered the priest, "but for a' that it's no so bad a billet for an old soldier. I had heard of this same old priest, my predecessor, and when the band was in the neighbourhood I set out to pay him a visit, but I found the puir auld greybeard dead, and the hawks picking oot his e'en. So I first buried him decently, and dressed myself like him in a full suit of grease and wood-ashes, and found that the villagers would give me all I wanted, and that I could make myself whisky from the corn, and that, after all, the life of a holy man was not one to be thrown aside until I had hit upon a better one, and was at any rate a more wholesome one than that of a robber in the band of Kara Kaplân."

"Well, yours is a strange story," returned Mr. Macalpine, "and I wish you all luck; but now I must say 'Good evening' to you, as our men will be wondering what has become of us."

"I may as well see you to the camp," returned the Caledonian priest, "for I am very much respected, and it may add to your safety being seen with me."

Before the pretended merchant could utter a word of remonstrance, Rab Dalhousie had sprung up the stairs, and whirling his club high above his head, and uttering a succession of howls, led the way with wild leaps and gesticulations, mingling words of Thibetan and Hindustani with long sentences of the broadest Scotch. Half annoyed and half amused, Mr. Macalpine followed, whilst Donald, who was almost bursting with laughter, brought up the rear.

Some hundred yards from the camp they met Dhurrumdasa, who had come out with a few of the escort to see if anything had happened to his master, and the Priest of the Bhoots danced round him, uttering wild yells, and occasionally pricking him with the sharp points of his club, to the Ladâki's intense disgust. At last, wearied with this occupation, the false priest turned a succession of somersaults, and, with another hideous yell, set out at a sharp run in the direction of the ruined tower.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BAND OF THE DESTROYER.

ALL night long the men of the escort who sat up to watch the camp were terrified by bursts of red and green flames from the ruined tower in which the Priest of the Bhoots had taken up his abode, which seemed to burst forth from all sorts of cavities and crannies, and every now and then lick the whole surface of the building with sheets of lambent flame. At last, just before sunrise, there was a loud and violent explosion, so loud and violent that they had seen a huge spiral column of fire shoot up from the tower; then there was a loud explosion, followed by a shower of stones and fragments of masonry, whilst, lastly, a thick mass of dust and smoke arose and appeared to wrap all the mysteries which had first taken place in its dusky embrace.

"I am afraid that our Scotch friend has been indulging too freely with the whisky jar," said Mr. Macalpine, as he rode slowly past the tower, which was now a mass of smouldering ruins.

"Nae fear, nae fear," exclaimed the well-known voice of the yogi, as his strangely bedecked figure rose up from a trench in the ground where he had been lying *perdu*. "I have just retired from my post with all the honours due to my rank, and am going to accompany you to keep the camp from the visits of bhoots and ghouls."

The leader of the string of mules had pulled up, and the escort stood in amazement at hearing this strange-looking object addressing their master in a strange and unknown tongue. For a few moments Mr. Macalpine was too much surprised to make any reply; then turning to Dhurrumdasa, in a few words of Hindustani hurriedly explained the case, and wished his advice as to what course he had best pursue.

"Turn not your back upon a countryman," answered the Ladâki, sententiously; "besides, I have heard much of this strange priest or his predecessor, and, for certain duties at least, his name and presence will be a safeguard to us."

"The only thing is, he once formed a portion of the band of Kara Kaplân," remarked Mr. Macalpine, "and so I hardly know whether to trust him or not."

"We must take the risk," answered Dhurrumdasa, and then turning to Dalhousie, he told him that his master was willing to permit him to follow the camp if he would consent to con-

form to all the rules that had been made for the guidance of the members of the caravan.

The disguised Scotchman gave a contemptuous grimace at receiving orders from a person whom he no doubt designated as a "nigger," but evidently thinking it best to comply with the conditions, he simply whirled his club round his head, uttered a succession of piercing shrieks in the very ear of the Ladâki, and then executing a grotesque dance for a few seconds, he fell peacefully into his place at the rear of the line, where he was looked upon with great respect by the grooms and mule-drivers.

At the end of the day's march, the pretended merchant contrived to obtain a few words with the disguised Scotchman, and urged caution upon him. They had now for a brief period quitted the high tablelands, and had descended into a broad valley, with a wide stream running down the centre, and large clumps of trees here and there along its banks. The merchant and his train were now approaching a comparatively large town, and, strange to say, none of the inhabitants came out to meet them.

"What on earth can be the matter with the town?" murmured Donald, as he pushed his pony up to the head of the column.

The place did present an unoccupied look; no watchmen challenged them from the walls, the gates were wide open, and only the sound of dogs howling could be heard within the centre of the place.

Hardly had Mr. Macalpine ridden through the gate than his pony shied so suddenly as almost to dislodge his rider from his seat, and a dark liquid pool into which he had stepped was splashed up around him on all sides.

"Why, this is blood!" said the pretended merchant; "some foul deed has been committed here," and hastily issuing some orders to Dhurrumdasa, the latter at once retired to a safe distance from the walls with half the escort and baggage, the bales composing which were piled up in front so as to form a species of entrenchment.

With the remainder of his men, his son, and the Priest of the Bhoots, Mr. Macalpine again rode boldly through the gateway. As he did so he felt his elbow touched, and turning sharply round, saw that the pretended priest had adopted this means of attracting his attention.

"Kara Kaplân," remarked the latter laconically, pointing with his war-club to the uninhabited wall.

The merchant's eyes followed the extended weapon, and to his horror he read, painted in the same curious fluid that had defiled the feet of his pony, these words written in the language of the country—

KARA KAPLÂN

has passed this way.

TREMBLE!

"So the bloodthirsty freebooter has been here, has he?" exclaimed Mr. Macalpine; "then I fear that terrible scenes have been enacted within the walls of this unhappy town. Let us push on, we perchance may find those who need our succour."

As they pressed on through the narrow streets the signs of pillage and depredation were now apparent. Shops had been plundered, the doors of private dwellings burst open, grain and various other objects which it had been unprofitable to take away had been tramped down into the mud and mire; but it was not until they had reached a small space in the centre of the town that the whole horror of what had taken place was presented to their astonished eyes. Beaten from the walls, the inhabitants had evidently made their last stand there, and had been cut down by the hardy assassins composing the band of the robber chief, after having offered a sturdy resistance. There they lay in a huge blood-stained heap: old men with their grey beards dabbled in blood, and their rusty swords still grasped in their stiffening fingers; men in the prime of life, with their wounds all in front; and mere lads, armed with slender spears or bows and arrows, all extended in one common heap of destruction. But this was not all, for in a separate mass, as though they had been collected together and led like sheep to the shambles, were a heap of women and children, bathed in blood and frightfully mutilated; whilst above all floated a scroll of parchment, affixed to a lance, upon which was written—

"*The inhabitants of this city*
slew fifteen of my soldiers, in return
I have taken the lives of ALL.

"KARA KAPLÂN."

For a brief period Mr. Macalpine and his men sat upon

their horses gazing upon this hideous scene of death and destruction; then a sigh burst from all their bosoms, and a simultaneous cry for vengeance was heard from every throat.

"There is no danger within the walls," said the merchant to one of his men. "Ride back and tell Dhurrumdasa to bring up the rest of the caravan that they may see the destruction that this fiend in human shape has wrought."

Before the man could obey the order, the Priest of the Bhoots sprang up into the air, and brandishing his mace with a loud yell, burst away to convey the news to the rest of the band. In the course of half an hour Dhurrumdasa and the remainder of the caravan filed into the market-place, and were equally surprised and horror-struck at the murderous cruelty that had taken place.

Mr. Macalpine addressed his men, and pointed out to them with what a dangerous foe they might at any moment have to contend. "We will," continued he, "run into no unnecessary danger, but I think that we have sufficient stout hearts amongst us to wrest the victory from a robber who is also a slayer of women and children."

"But he has slain strong men, too, sahib," remarked one of the escort, a little active Ghoorka, pointing to the heap of dead men. "We will do much for honour and for the protection of those whose salt we have eaten; but we, too, have wives and children, and it will not do to throw away our lives for the sake of guarding a merchant's goods."

A murmur of assent arose from the other men, and for the moment Mr. Macalpine began to fear that his men would travel no further with him; but at that moment an unexpected auxiliary came to his assistance in the shape of the Priest of the Bhoots, who, speaking to the point, and brandishing his club, addressed the band in his usual ear-splitting strains—

"Oh, men of little courage," shouted he, "if you cannot depend upon your sharp swords to save your heads, better lay down and yield yourselves to the mercies of the robber. Rouse yourselves, I say! rouse yourselves! I tell you that the legions of the spirits whose high priest I am will watch over you, and will turn aside your enemies with their white hands and pale, gleaming faces! Rouse yourselves, I say! pluck up courage, and the day shall be your own!"

The superstitious feelings of the soldiery were excited by this appeal to their feelings, and with a loud shout they clashed their swords and shields together, and defied Kara Kaplân and his band.

"Stay," said Dhurrumdasa, "you will be better able to contend in bitter times if you take possession of the brave shirts of mail and helmets that belonged to these poor fellows." And suiting the action to the word he stooped, and carefully stripping the shirt of mail from an old man who lay in the foremost line of dead, he cast it over his shoulders, and then placing a steel helmet with its flowing hood of chain mail upon his head, he braced a semi-transparent rhinocerous-hide shield upon his arm, and belting a Persian sabre round his waist, looked every inch a gallant warrior. The rest of the escort followed his example, and in a few minutes changed their arms and accoutrements for the better and superior class.

Not a living soul was to be found in the city, and Mr. Macalpine, ordering the gates to be closed so as to prevent the ravenous beasts of the field from making their way in and mutilating the dead, retired to the camp with saddened thoughts. Early the next morning the camp was struck, and again the little caravan moved away deep into the heart of the country, whilst more than one heart trembled with the fear that every step might bring them nearer to the presence of the dreaded Kara Kaplân.

CHAPTER X.

A SCENE OF RETRIBUTION.

For some days no fresh events occurred to break the monotony of the camp life. Occasionally the headmen of the different villages would sit for hours in the merchant's tent looking over the various articles of merchandise, and occasionally making small purchases, but these occasions were few and far between. One night the stillness was broken by hideous yells and roars, which continued for some hours. The sounds were so really hideous that they did not seem to belong to this earth. Donald crept closer to his father's side, and clasped his hands in his. Dhurrumdasa's lips moved, and he was evidently praying inwardly; whilst the escort and muleteers crowded round the Priest of the Bhoots, who was almost blue with terror, and besought him to give them some explanation regarding the hideous sounds, which rose and fell almost without intermission from nightfall to sunrise, when they commenced

to die away into moans and low whispers. Some three or four miles off, upon the slope of a low range of hills, could be seen a dark mass, which one of the men who was acquainted with that portion of the country said was an oak forest of some extent, and from this the terrible cries seemed to come. The route for the next day's march lay through this, and so Mr. Macalpine felt that it would not be long before the mystery was solved. The road that the caravan took the next morning was rather a devious one, and it was some time before they came in sight of the little forest, and then the leading muleteer suddenly came to a halt, and with an expression of the utmost terror ran back to Mr. Macalpine and Dhurrumdasa, who were bringing up the rear. After listening to his report, they pushed forward to an immense boulder, which rose from the plain a few yards to the right of the track. A terrible sight presented itself to their eyes. Eight bodies of stalwart bronze-browed men were laid out side by side in a regular manner, but what made their appearance more horrible was that they were gashed and torn as if by the teeth and claws of some savage animal: flesh, muscle, and sinew had absolutely been torn away, and almost every semblance of humanity had been rent from their features. On a smaller portion of the overhanging boulder were a few rough lines to this effect—

> "These poor fellows were sacrificed in one
> of Kara Kaplân's hunting expeditions.
> The race that destroyed them have met
> with their deserts in yonder wood.
> So perish all who cross the path of
> "KARA KAPLÂN."

With a mute look of inquiry, Mr. Macalpine gave the order to push on, and in a few minutes more the caravan entered the forest. All was still and quiet, but after a few yards had been traversed the ponies and mules, with sudden snorts of terror, stamped their feet firmly in the ground and disregarded all the blows and coaxings which their conductors used to induce them to proceed further. Upon every other oak tree upon each side of the narrow path was the carcase of a huge bear suspended by the hind legs by stout circles of raw hide from strong branches. The unhappy beasts were dead, and almost perforated with arrows; but the swollen eyeballs and the blood and foam which still trickled from their mouths and nostrils showed how terrible must have been their tortures before death came as a relief to their sufferings.

"Why, this man must be an incarnate fiend," exclaimed Donald, glancing with surprise and horror at the scene. "There must be fully fifty of these terrible creatures. He must have hunted the country for miles before he could have secured so many. And then think of the risk and danger that must have been incurred in suspending them from the trees in this cruel manner!"

"May Providence preserve us from falling into his hands," answered the pretended merchant. "It seems as if we were unable to get away from his vicinity. I have half a mind to turn directly away from the path that we are pursuing, other wise I feel certain we shall run across him some time or other."

"Sahib," whispered the Ladâki, "let us push on and trust in Providence; we are yet many miles' journey from the great salt lakes and the basaltic rock in which lurks the Vanishing Diamond. Any deviation from the right path now might entail the delay of another twelve months; for, as I told you, the precious stone only appears for a few hours at a stated date in any year, and then vanishes in a mysterious manner that has never yet been solved."

"Evil will come of it, I fear," returned the merchant. "And yet it would be cowardly to retreat, and so I suppose we had better go on; but let us push through this terrible grove, and get out of the horrible sights, which are even worse than the sounds which we heard last night."

Casting many a look of terror to the right and left, the muleteers and escort urged forward their animals, many of whom had to be blindfolded before they could be induced to pass the pendant monsters; but at last the confines of the forest were passed, and all then gave a deep sigh of relief as the grove and its grisly tenants were left far behind. That night the Priest of the Bhoots crept up to the merchant's tent, and, glancing round to see that no one was near, whispered—

"Eh, mon," said he, "I've been breakin' my heart ta hae a claver wi' ye aboot ony of thae chiels gettin' their lugs tae close. Ye ken weel that I tauld ye that for a time I was wi' that murderin' villain Kara Kaplân's band. Aweel, he seems ta hae communication wi' the speerits mickle mair than ever I had, for he has found me oot amangst ye all, and has sent me a token that I am tae haud mysel' at his disposal in all things under the penalty of being treated as a traitor and deserter."

"Found you out! and here!" exclaimed Mr Macalpine, starting to his feet and laying his hand upon his rifle. "Do you mean to say that he knows of the existence of this expe-

dition? Have you been playing me false after my kindness to you?"

"Hoots, toots, mon, fair an' saftly; dinna flash yersel' like that," answered the disguised Scotchman. "It is joost for the reason that I am leal an' true that ye find me creeping through the darkness like a thief an' a robber. Look here," and as he spoke he extended towards the merchant a short reed arrow with a broad steel barb and the feathers smeared with a crimson sticky fluid which was but too evidently blood.

"What is this?" asked Mr. Macalpine, handling the weapon with evident feelings of disgust and repugnance.

"It is the summons that Kara Kaplân always sends to those whom he considers his henchmen. And woe be to them if they are slow to obey him," returned the pretended priest.

"And how did you get this, and what orders did you receive with it?" asked Mr. Macalpine, tossing away the arrow from him.

"Aweel, he joost sent it to me by a black-visaged loon that said he had been dogging my footsteps for days, and who had the impudence to join the gude auld Scottish prefix of Andrew to the heathenish name of De Cruz."

Mr. Macalpine started.

"And he told me," continued the priest, "to come tae him the nicht and receive my orders."

"Is he so close, then? and has he my bitterest enemy, De Cruz, with him?" asked the merchant.

"I dinna ken where he is lurking," replied the Scotchman; "but I was to go with the chiel De Cruz, and I had joost made up my mind to twa courses, aboot the whilk I cam' to consult ye."

The merchant remained silent, and the Priest of the Bhoots went on—

"Ain course is maist simple: it is joost ta gang wi' the black-visaged loon into the gudeman Kaplân's presence and joost to brain him wi' a touch o' this wee bit stick;" and he finished the sentence by a thundering flourish of his mace. "But," he added, "there is joost ain objection ta it."

"And what is that?" asked Mr. Macalpine.

"His men would half flay me, rub honey intil the raw flesh an' tie me tae a tree for the flies and wasps tae eat," answered Rab, composedly.

"That is certainly an objection," returned the merchant, with a smile. "And pray what is the other course you suggest?"

"Pile up the bales, mak' a braid ditch roun' the camp, hae gude store o' water and provisions, and when the bloodthirsty chiel come up ramping and ravaging, gie him cauld kail through his wame," answered the Scotchman, briskly.

"Forgive me for having doubted you," said the merchant, pressing the priest's hand. "I see that I can trust you. Yes, we will make a brave stand, and ten to one we shall beat off those cowardly scoundrels. When, pray, were you to meet that villain De Cruz?"

"The noo," returned the Scotchman, coolly, as he took up a rifle and crept quietly out of the tent.

In a few minutes a sharp report was heard, and Rab returned with an air of disappointment in his face.

"Well?" queried Mr. Macalpine.

"Aweel, I joost missed the loon," returned Rab, "for I saw him kicking up his heels and louping like a dog through the moonlight. If alive, he's gone tae tell his maister that we mean mischief."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ATTACK.

THE shot alarmed the camp, and in a few minutes every one was on the alert; and soon the escort, glittering in their new accoutrements, clustered round the merchant, presenting a really formidable appearance. In a few brief words Mr. Macalpine explained the danger that awaited them, and urged the necessity of making a bold stand and teaching the robber a lesson which he would not forget in a hurry. The immediate presence of danger seemed to act upon the minds of the men, and, urged on by the words and exhortations of the Priest of the Bhoots, they worked with a will with mattock and pick, and speedily surrounded the camp with a deep ditch, the earth from which, when thrown up on the other side, formed a tolerably efficient rampart. Wood and water was brought in, and every preparation was made for a siege, whilst the mules and ponies were placed out of reach of stray bullets in an excavation which had been hastily made in the centre of the camp. The tents had all been struck and the canvas drenched with water, so that the enemy might not be able to divert the attention of the defenders by discharging cannon at them to which burning

tow had been affixed. By daylight all was ready, and each man was at his post matchlock in hand, whilst the Priest of the Bhoots had armed himself with a long duck-gun, the property of Donald, which, to the astonishment of the escort, he handled with the air of one well accustomed to the use of such a weapon. With the daylight a dark mass appeared upon the hills above, while the glitter of lance-points and the flutter of pennons could be plainly seen, and in a short time a force of about seventy men, horse and foot, could be seen advancing across the plain in regular order, and coming directly upon the camp.

"I think that the priest's shot must have told after all," remarked Mr. Macalpine, as he closed the telescope through which he had been watching the advance of the foemen, "for I can see a litter in the rear of the line of horsemen."

"The odds are terrible ones," suggested the Ladâki, thoughtfully. "We cannot muster more than twenty, and Kara Kaplân's band numbers seventy at least."

"We shall have the advantage of fighting behind cover," returned the merchant; "and I expect that our men are better disciplined. If the first disorganized rush of the robbers is repulsed with loss, it will be a long time before they pluck up courage to make a fresh attempt."

"Besides," muttered the Ladâki, thoughtfully, "the men know that they are fighting for their lives, for the robber Kara Kaplân has never been known to give quarter or encumber himself with prisoners."

Meanwhile the advancing force had advanced to within about four hundred yards of the camp, when a horseman rode up from the ranks, and, raising his spear on high, shouted out some words which were evidently a command to halt, for both horse and foot at once became stationary. Then, at a fresh order, the cavalry alighted, and, planting their long lances in the ground, began to picket their horses, whilst the infantry advanced a few yards to the front and laid down upon the plain.

"Father," exclaimed Donald, "do these fellows think that they are out of range? Why, we could pick off every one of them with our rifles at the distance they now are."

"I do not wish to commence the attack," returned his father, "nor do I wish you to join in this scene of carnage, at which I bitterly regret your presence. Suppose you give your rifle to Rab Dalhousie. I cannot bear to think of your directing a weapon against human life."

"And am I to be left unarmed, and with nothing to defend myself with, in case they come to close quarters?" returned

the boy, very much hurt at not being allowed to join in a fray in which he was burning to distinguish himself.

"You can take the duck gun," returned the merchant; and Donald, without waiting for his father to change his mind, rushed off and speedily effected the exchange, for he felt sure that with a good carrying duck gun, and a good charge of No. 3, he could make himself as disagreeable to the robber as his heart could desire.

A man now detached himself hurriedly from a group which had collected in front of the enemy's line, and binding a slip of white linen to the end of his lance, stepped towards the camp. He was followed by four men, bearing a litter upon which a form was reclining. The man bearing the flag of truce advanced within fifty paces of the camp, and then shouted out that he had a message to deliver if any one would come out from the entrenchment to listen to it. Mr. Macalpine at once took his rifle, and scrambling over the rampart dashed into the ditch, and as soon as he gained the plain advanced towards the messenger. As he did so, the litter was placed on the ground, and a figure rose from it and limped towards the merchant, who at once recognized the face and form of the half-caste Andrew De Cruz.

"Ha, ha!" cried De Cruz, with a malignant grin upon his face; "you see you do not get rid of me so easily. I have come from my potent lord, Kara Kaplân, ordering you to give up all your goods, arms, baggage and animals, together with every single article of property that you possess."

"What will you leave us, then, for ourselves?" asked the merchant, calmly.

"Your lives, you dog, your lives," returned the half-caste, grinding his teeth, "and that is enough for you to carry away with you."

"Thank you, but the terms are not good enough," replied Mr. Macalpine. "Tell the robber, whose emissary you have degraded yourself into being, that we have no gold to give him, but plenty of lead."

"You white-faced dog!" said the enraged half-caste. "It your men knew the real state of affairs they would hand you over bound hand and foot to Kara Kaplân, and join him in a moment. Listen here," and raising his voice, he cried, in their own language, "Ho! my brave fellows, do you know that you are utterly deceived, and that this pretended Mussul man merchant is a Christian dog in disguise, come to rob the land of a valuable diamond."

"If you utter another word to my men, I will shoot you through the heart," said Mr. Macalpine, levelling his rifle. "Stop; remember I am in earnest," he continued, as the half-caste seemed about to speak. "The flag of truce covers no attempt to tamper with the opposing force. Go back to your robber chief, and thank my mercy that I do not shoot you down for the cowardly attempt upon my son's life."

For a moment De Cruz hesitated, then seeing the look of determination in the merchant's face, he seemed to consider that discretion was the better part of valour, and uttering a few words to the litter-bearers he clambered hastily in, and was borne away with some celerity.

Mr. Macalpine waited until the half-caste and his companions had got beyond hearing, and then slinging his rifle across his back, descended into the ditch and gained the camp in safety.

As soon as the half-caste reached Kara Kaplân's band he evidently delivered his message, for an angry murmur arose, and there was a great clashing of swords and brandishing of spears, and then leaving some men in charge of the horses and baggage, the band led on by the redoubted Kara Kaplân himself. When they came within a hundred yards of the entrenchment, the robber chief raised his voice, and ordered an unconditional surrender.

"Get you hence," said the Ladâki, ascending to the summit of the rampart, "and leave us to go on our way in peace. We are harmless wayfarers, and wish to do no harm to any one."

For all reply, the robber chief raised his sword, and as the Ladâki leapt down within the entrenchment, a shower of matchlock balls whistled above his head.

This unprovoked attack was at once replied to by the escort, and several of the robber band limped to the rear suffering from slight wounds, though the chain mail and plate armour in which they were clad saved them from more severe wounds. These few shots from Mr. Macalpine's and the priest's rifle stretched three of the marauders on the ground, and before they could make a fresh advance another matchlock volley threw them into such utter confusion that they turned and fled, leaving Kara Kaplân waving his sword and objurgating his recreant followers in the choicest terms of Eastern abuse. It is impossible to say how long he might have remained shouting and cursing, or how long or what effect his supplications might have had upon his followers, but Donald,

creeping to the front, took a steady aim and discharged the contents of his duck gun at the robber. A perfect hail of No. 4 shot rattled against the robber's armour, and several of the pellets stung him sharply about the face and hands. Small shot was not at all in Kara Kaplân's way, and with a yell of surprise and dismay, the robber dropped his sword and shield, and scampered after his retreating followers as fast as his legs would carry him. The little garrison were highly elated at this speedy and unexpected victory, but both Mr. Macalpine and Dhurrumdasa knew that this check was but a temporary one, and that as soon as the first panic was over, the robber would return to the attack. And this seemed to be the case, for, after some half-hour's delay, the robbers had collected a quantity of cattle, which was evidently the fruits of a recent raid, drew them to the front, and under cover of this moving rampart, advanced for a second time to the attack of the fortified camp.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TIGER'S CLAW.

THE garrison poured in a heavy fire upon the advancing robbers, but the advanced guard of cattle diverted the bullets, whilst the fire of the robbers wounded several of the garrison slightly. The moment that the Priest of the Bhoots perceived the *ruse* adopted by the robbers, he had thrown down his rifle and retired to the rear of the camp, where, seating himself by the side of a keg of powder, he began to busy himself in the manufacture of a strange object, in which slightly damped powder and canvas formed the component parts. The cattle had by this time been driven up almost to the edge of the ditch, and it was impossible for the defenders of the entrenchment to inflict any injury upon their assailants, protected as they were by the horned rampart. Suddenly the Priest of the Bhoots sprang upon the summit of the rampart, and holding in his hand a cylindrical object with conical projections from which a blueish smoke was ascending, hurled it into the midst of the cattle. In a moment the things began to dance about, send out showers of sparks, and explode with a series of sharp bangs. The frightened animals broke right and left, and turning from the ditch in which the giant cracker was still fizzing

and cracking, burst through the ranks of the robbers, tumbling them over in every direction, and trampling them under foot. The men of the garrison stood on the ramparts and laughed loudly and uproariously at this second defeat of the valiant troops of Kara Kaplân, and every now and then fired a parting shot at the confused mass of their retreating foes.

There was no further attack made that night, and the robbers lighting huge fires prepared their evening meal, and appeared to be in no hurry to commence another assault upon a point that was so strongly defended. The little garrison was in a high state of jubilation, but both Mr. Macalpine and Dhurrumdasa knew that the combined instincts of plunder and revenge were not as yet by any means satisfied. A careful watch and guard was kept during the night, but no fresh attack was made by the robber and his adherents. And it was not until shortly after sunrise that Kara Kaplân, accompanied by a couple of followers, one of whom carried a white flag, rode up to the edge of the ditch, and asked to see the chief of the fortified camp.

By previous arrangement Dhurrumdasa appeared upon the ramparts. He had taken off his fighting dress, and only carried his Persian sword in his hand. As soon as the robber chief perceived Dhurrumdasa, he sprang from his horse and addressed the Ladâki in accents which he endeavoured to render polite. He was a tall and graceful man, but exceedingly meagre looking, almost like a skeleton; he had a large hooked nose, a thick, bushy moustache and beard, and was dressed with the foppish extravagance affected by the Eastern soldiers of fortune. His steel helmet was gorgeously jewelled, and the chain mail hood that depended from it was worked in various arabesques of gold and silver. His mail coat was of the finest Persian handiwork, and was as soft and lissom as silk. He wore high scarlet morocco boots, and his hands were protected by chain gloves with elaborately engraved steel plates reaching to the elbow. The hilts of both sabre and dagger were richly ornamented, and he carried on his left arm a richly embossed shield of the well-known Guzenthi work.

"Ho, brave warrior!" said this redoubtable personage, addressing Dhurrumdasa, "Kara Kaplân can admire courage, even when exercised against himself; but, tell me, is it your wonderful intellect and martial instinct that has directed the defence of this post?"

"I am in command," returned the Ladâki, evasively.

"It is well," returned the robber chief. "Will a brother

soldier come out to receive the embrace of friendship at the hands of a brother soldier who can admire bravery even though it be directed against himself?"

The Ladâki folded his arms and remained silent.

"Brave warrior," continued Kara Kaplân, with a gracious inclination of his head, "will it please you to descend from the rampart, and allow me the pleasure of embracing you before I draw off my men and leave you to the peace which you have so gallantly earned?"

"Is there to be peace between us, then?" asked Dhurrumdasa, raising his hand to his head in sign of salute.

"It is, brave warrior," answered the robber. "I have a word or two for your private ear. Have you any fears? See, I dismiss my followers." And with these words he tore off his sword and dagger and handed them to his followers, who rode across the plain in the direction of the robber band. "See," continued Kara Kaplân, "I am unarmed. Pause not to put on your armour, but come at once; Kara Kaplân does not wish to tarry where his pride has been humbled, and must move off his forces before the sun rises to his utmost height in the heavens."

All seemed fair and above-board, and the Ladâki, turning from the rampart, descended into the interior of the camp, with the intention of making his way to the plain outside through an opening which had been left in the parapet. Suddenly the Priest of the Bhoots sprang up to him, and raised his hand above his head as if about to invoke a blessing. "Ere you go out to meet with the murderer and oppressor," cried he wildly, "let the priest of the spirits of the grave whisper in your ear a charm that may perhaps preserve you from the power of the evil influences which hover over the head of Kara Kaplân."

"Tush, man!" returned the Ladâki, impatiently; "you forget that I know your secret, and want none of this mummery. I go but to lay aside my arms and armour, and have no time for delay."

"Listen, mon," whispered the Scotchman, forcibly bending down the head of Dhurrumdasa; "keep the steel claes on your bodie, but just pit on a wee bit coatie over it."

"What do you mean?" asked the Ladâki.

"The tiger's claws, mon! *the tiger's claws!*" said the Priest of the Bhoots.

"Ha!" said the Ladâki, as an expression of intelligence passed over his face. "Is it so?"

"I ha'e seen them and mony times," answered Rab, with a wink.

The Ladâki hurriedly covered his bulky person with a thick puttoo coat, and then sallied out to meet the robber chief, Kara Kaplân. In a few minutes the late adversaries were standing a few yards distant from each other, and the robber was salaaming with every gesture of admiration and respect.

"One brave soldier has ever confidence in another, you see," remarked Kara Kaplân, as he advanced with extended arms, as though to press Dhurrumdasa to his breast. The Ladâki stood awaiting his approach with his arms folded, and an expression of calm contempt upon his face.

"One embrace, and we part never to meet again," cried the robber, in insinuating accents. "And, much as I should regret it, may we never meet again; for when two brave warriors meet, blood too often flows."

"A treacherous deed does not require two brave men; one brave man and a coward are sufficient," returned the Ladâki, grimly.

"Who talks of cowards?" answered Kara Kaplân. "Come, let us embrace and depart."

"Come, then," said Dhurrumdasa, extending his arms; "and curses be on him who meditates treachery."

"So be it," said the robber; and, taking a step or two forward, he grasped the Ladâki round the waist. As he did so, he gave a sudden thrust, and a harsh, grating sound was heard, as of metal rasping upon metal.

The Ladâki seized Kara Kaplân by the throat, and, holding him up for an instant in the air, dashed him to the ground with superhuman force. "Behold the traitor's work!" shouted he; and raising the hands of the senseless man, he showed that sharp steel hooks, fashioned like the talons of a wild beast, were fastened in the inside of his hands by rings, through which the fingers passed.

The Tiger's Claws, as this terrible weapon is called, has often been used as a means of murder in the terrible episodes that have characterized Indian history.

"Beware! beware, Dhurrumdasa!" cried Mr. Macalpine; and the Ladâki had only just time to spring back into the camp as the horsemen of the robber, who had evidently acted on a given signal, swept down, and, raising the prostrate body of their chief from the ground, bore him away to a safe distance, amidst the yell of execration and derision at the discomfited traitors which rose from within the camp.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEMON OF THE STREAM.

THE night following the encounter between Kara Kaplân and Dhurrumdasa was oppressively hot, varied only by a scorching dry wind, like the breath of a furnace, which seemed to wither up everything as it swept across the plains. The ponies and mules seemed very uneasy, and, with their ears laid back and their flanks quivering, stood trembling on the spot to which their head and heel ropes confined them.

"This is very strange weather," murmured Mr. Macalpine to the Ladâki. "We surely ought never to have it so oppressive at this season of the year."

"It is strange, and most unaccountable," returned Dhurrumdasa; "and such weather generally portends some convulsion of nature. If you remember, just before the cataclysm the day was almost stifling."

"Aiblains," whispered the false priest, coming forward cautiously and glancing around to see that he was not overheard. "Aiblains, it is the Demon of the Stream coming in *propriâ personâ*, as the dominie used to say. I have often threatened the puir simple villagers wi' his visits, and perhaps he is coming the noo in stern reality."

"Nonsense, man!" returned Mr. Macalpine, slowly. "Do you not know better than to utter such foolish opinions before the lad?"

"Oh, he won't frighten me, father!" answered Donald, with a light laugh. "I can make a better ghost out of a scooped-out turnip with a piece of candle in it than his reverence could ever conjure up; but I candidly confess that I wish it was not so hot. I have been doing nothing but drink water for the past half-hour."

"Jist tak' ain look then for yourselves," returned Rab Dalhousie, sulkily pointing to a huge dark pillar of cloud with a strange lurid light round its edges, which had just become visible on the horizon, "and maybe ye'll no' be saying that it is naething."

"Look rather to immediate than possible future danger," shouted the Ladâki, who had been peering out into the darkness. "To arms, men! Kara Kaplân and his band are upon us!"

His statement was a correct one; for, taking advantage of

the close of night, the robber and his men had crept up close to the camp, and as soon as they perceived that they were discovered, made a dash, sword in hand, at the rampart. They met with a warm reception; but the weight of their numbers prevailed, and, step by step, they forced the defenders back within the precincts of the camp, and followed them up.

Kara Kaplân, uttering fierce yells and urging on his men to slay and spare none, cut right and left with his keen blade, and displayed that swordsmanship for which he had gained an unrivalled reputation. Mr. Macalpine was hurled to the ground in the crush, and would undoubtedly have been slain by one of the robbers had not Donald discharged the contents of his duck-gun into the man's arm, causing him to drop his uplifted dagger with a shrill cry of pain. The Priest of the Bhoots fought bravely, inflicting severe damage with his spiked club, and taking advantage of the awe which his supposed profession (for his identity as a former member of the band was only known to Kara Kaplân and the half-caste) inspired. It was, however, but only too evident that the merchant's followers were terribly outnumbered, and must speedily give way.

Dhurrumdasa perceived this, and amongst the flashing of the matchlocks, the clash of steel, and the clatter of sword and spear upon iron-bound shields, his cries rose up loud and clear.

"Kara Kaplân!" cried he, "traitor and murderer! cease this waste of human life, and meet me like a man! Let our own good swords decide the matter. If you can slay me, take the goods, but let my masters be free."

He paused for an instant, and the robber chief broke in:

"I shall slay thee, vain boaster; but suppose Fate decrees that I should fall, what terms do you then propose?"

"None are needed," replied the Ladâki, scornfully. "When I sever your head from your shoulders, and raise it aloft for all to see, your men will fly like affrighted sheep who have lost their shepherd."

"The blade is not yet forged that shall slay Kara Kaplân," shouted the robber, angrily; "but if you desire death at my hand, be it so. It is too great an honour for a peasant churl; but no matter. Bid your men stand back, and I will do the same to mine."

Without much reluctance the combatants separated, leaving Kara Kaplân and the Ladâki facing each other. Both were similarly armed and weaponed—helmet, shirt of mail, gauntlets, curved sabre, and shield. The robber chief was much taller

than his antagonist; but Dhurrumdasa's limbs were cast in a powerful mould, and he formed no contemptible antagonist. Crouching down, with their shields raised on high and their keen blades held ready to strike, the swordsmen crept stealthily round each other. Each seemed to believe that he was standing before a dangerous adversary, and that any false move might bring a speedy and fatal termination to the combat. Suddenly Kara Kaplân straightened himself, and made a leap forward. There was a bright flash of steel and a sharp clash, as the Ladâki skilfully parried the cut with his shield; and it was only by a quick backward movement that the robber chief avoided the return blow, which came quick and steady as though given by a machine. A quick rally and a rapid interchange of blows followed; but the defensive armour that the combatants wore prevented any harm save a few trivial cuts and unimportant scratches.

For an instant the antagonists drew back to take breath, and, after the fashion of the East, the robber chief began to jeer at his antagonist.

"You will not find it so easy a task to slay Kara Kaplân, the Black Eagle of the Mountains, my bold peasant," sneered he. "Be wise, and give in before the life is hacked out of you. I promise you that I will spare your life, and will only use your broad back as a footstool to mount my horse."

"Spare your breath," retured the Ladâki, coolly; "you will want it all. But, come, are we two children at play that we need this long rest?"

And as he spoke he delivered a swinging cut which, catching the robber on the side of the helmet, sent him staggering back half a dozen paces. Furious at this unexpected rebuff, Kara Kaplân sprang savagely at his adversary, and rained a torrent of blows upon him, all of which, however, were rendered harmless by the defensive armour and shield of the Ladâki. Thus they circled round exchanging sweeping cuts, until at length Dhurrumdasa's sword alighted full upon his antagonist's helmet, bringing the robber to his knees, but shivering like glass with the force of the blow. With a cry of triumph the cowardly robbers sprang forward to rescue their leader and to cut down the disarmed man, but the escort, headed by the Scotch priest, interfered, and for a moment it seemed as if the combat was about to be renewed with all its former vigour. At that instant, however, a series of loud reports were heard in the heavens above, and a bright flash shot across the sky, the ground within the camp heaved and trembled, and at the

very spot where the robber band stood a gigantic spout of boiling muddy water burst forth, causing them to fly from the camp and scramble down the parapet into the ditch with loud cries of terror and affright. With an active spring, Mr. Macalpine sprang to the excavation in which the horses and mules had been tethered, and, drawing his knife, severed the ropes that confined them, work in which he was assisted by Donald. He was only just in time, for fresh upheavals of the soil took place, and fresh eruptions of scalding water and boiling mud burst through the surface of the earth. The affrighted animals, as soon as they were released, rushed from the camp beyond the reach of the terrible element, but as though afraid to abandon the protection to be derived from the companionship of man they halted a little distance off, and with outstretched heads and distended nostrils gazed upon the scene of desolation and destruction.

The bright light had now died away in the heavens, and for a few minutes intense darkness prevailed, through which strange and ominous rumblings were heard which seemed to proceed from the centre of the earth. The merchant and his men, aided by Dhurrumdasa and Rab, removed as much of their property as they could from the vicinity of the boiling torrent, but the escort and muleteers seemed to be too much paralyzed by fear and surprise to render the slightest assistance, and standing upon the ramparts they uttered low moans of terror and amazement.

Kara Kaplân had remained upon his knees in the position where the sword of Dhurrumdasa had forced him, but the boiling slime which had now begun to collect around him soon made this resting-place untenable, and with a cry of pain he rose to his feet and staggered to the spot where the merchant was standing. Even the terrors of the night could not change his murderous instincts, and as he noticed that he was unperceived he made a deadly cut at Donald as he passed by him to rejoin his men. To his surprise his sword, instead of penetrating through soft and yielding flesh, encountered a hard substance which jarred his arm to the elbow, and looking round he saw the grinning face of Rab Dalhousie, who had interposed his club between the robber's sabre and his intended victim.

"Dog and traitor!" cried the infuriated bandit, "you, at any rate, shall not escape me." And rushing upon the priest he struck right and left.

"Eneuch, mon, eneuch," returned the Scotchman, parrying

the blows easily with a few flourishes of his heavy club. "Do ye no ken that the blackest loon in a' the countrie roun' is nae match for Rab Dalhousie, wha learnet ta use the claymore from auld Sairgent Macalister wha fought wi' the Duke at Waterloo? See there, mon, and there, and there."

And with which exclamation his heavy club descended on the helmet and shoulders of his antagonist, breaking through the steel links of the mail and drawing the blood freely.

The robber howled with rage and pain, threw himself back to make a last and more successful attack, when a louder explosion than had yet been heard made the welkin ring, a long line of lambent red fire ran along the ground behind Kara Kaplân and the earth opened in its wake, whilst a thick vapour emitting a sickening stench rose from it with occasional jets of flame of many hues. As the robber glanced round his eyes met this terrible sight, and at this moment the soil gave way beneath his feet, and he slipped backwards into the yawning abyss. As his chest now struck the side he managed to retain his hold with his hands and elbows, and with piteous cries entreated to be rescued from his hideously perilous position. Mr. Macalpine and his son stepped forward, nor was Dhurrumdasa the Ladâki behind, but with a loud cry of "What gar ye meddle wi' my ain handiwork?" Rab Dalhousie struck the struggling wretch a heavy blow with his club, and precipitated him into the yawning abyss. A fresh subterranean rumble drowned his death shriek, and with a fresh outburst of flame the earth closed over the living grave of the most bloodthirsty monster that had ever devastated the plains of Thibet.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PEACEFUL MUTINY.

MORNING broke upon the terrible scene of desolation which the convulsion of nature had caused. The little camp was a sea of liquid mud from which a thick steamy exhalation was ascending, and beneath which lay many articles of property which it had been impossible to remove before the eruption had attained its full height and strength.

Mr. Macalpine, as he gazed upon the scene of destruction, felt that his career as a merchant was at an end, and considered

by what means he could resume his quest of the Vanishing Diamond, or what fresh excuse he could invent for wandering over the fields and plains of Thibet.

"Sahib," said Dhurrumdasa, "do not be cast down: our lives are mercifully preserved to us; the robber chief has met with a terrible end, which I cannot but think is the right reward of his crimes; his band have fled, for nothing remains of their camp save the whitened ashes of their fires."

"I should be more satisfied if I knew the villain De Cruz had shared his master's fate," returned the merchant, bitterly, "for as long as he lives I cannot think that any of our lives are safe."

Donald was standing by his father's side leaning upon the barrel of his long duck gun. The naturally happy countenance of the lad wore a saddened expression; though he had borne himself bravely during the skirmish, it was the first time he had seen blood spilt and blows struck in anger, and the sad experience had cast a blight upon his soul. Rab Dalhousie with one of the tent-poles was driving the iron at the end of it into the mud, trying to fish up some of the articles that had been buried under the slimy torrent. The escort and the muleteers had gathered together in a small knot, and were talking and gesticulating loudly and eagerly together. At length they appeared to have come to some sort of a determination, for, coming up to Mr. Macalpine, they formed a ring round him, whilst the grey-bearded Ghoorka, who had evidently been elected spokesman, began to address him.

"Sahib," began he, "we have been true and faithful to the salt which we have eaten, and have not spared even our blood in your service: some of us have paid for our devotion with our lives, for three of our bravest comrades lie buried beneath yon sea of boiling mud, hacked to death by the swords of the robbers. But of this we do not complain; it was a portion of the risk that we were expected to do, and we have no fear of facing death at the hands of our fellow-mortals."

He paused and gazed upon his companions, who signified there assent by a low murmur of applause.

"Well," returned Mr. Macalpine, "what further have you to say, for I suppose there is more yet to come?"

"Sahib," answered the old man, thoughtfully stroking his grey beard, "there *is* yet more to come, as you have surmised. Strange hints have been dropped that you and the young sahib there are not merchants at all, as you profess to be, and that your destination is an unhallowed region where the evil

spirits have power, in quest of a certain stone which has been accursed for many generations. Strange and mysterious events have shown us that your errand is an unpleasing one to the power that rules the universe, and the terrible events of last night have only too clearly proved to us that such is the case. Who ever saw boiling fountains of mud burst out through the surface of the earth, or saw the earth open and swallow up its victims alive?"

"But it was our enemy that was swallowed up, and not ourselves, most worthy Ghoorka," interrupted the pretended priest.

"Holy priest," returned the man, with a wave of his hand, "we respect you, but your religion is not ours, and we hear you talking to the sahib, our master, in strange and unknown tongues. This is not a matter for religious discussion, but a mere affair of business which we desire to have settled, therefore let not your tongue meddle in that which concerns you not."

Again the same hum of applause came from the auditors, and the old man went on—

"We therefore ask you, sahib, to pay us what remains to us and to give us a mule to carry our *dekshies* (cooking utensils) and tent, and let us go back to our own land; or should you desire to return to the home of the Feringhi we will faithfully escort you thither, but further upon the accursed plains filled with demons and sons of Eblis we will not go. Have I spoken well, my brethren, and are the sentiments I have expressed your own?"

"Ha, ha, shabash" ("Yes, yes, well said"), and other various forms of assent burst from the crowd, and hardly had these died away than Dhurrumdasa began to speak.

"You may be true," said he, "to the letter of the agreement, but you have wandered widely from the spirit. Do you call it being true to your salt to leave the sahib that you have sworn to protect to wander friendless and alone over these trackless and hostile plains? If he has paid you in money for your services, has he not also stood shoulder to shoulder with you in the day of strife and battle? and now you would slink away like curs because there has been a little storm and tempest which has made your enemies fly like chaff before the wind of heaven. When I selected you for a difficult and dangerous enterprise I thought that I was dealing with men who had the courage of the tiger of the jungle in their hearts, and not the timidity of the mountain deer."

"Further talk is useless, Dhurrumdasa," returned the spokesman; "our minds are fully made up. If the sahib can give us our wages, well and good; if not, we will trust him. Surely he can give us a *hoondie* (order) upon some native *shroff* (banker), and we will trust to its being honourably paid when we present it; but further into these plains we will not go."

"It is useless talking to them, Dhurrumdasa," said the merchant; "they are not unreasonable according to their light. Give me half an hour, my good fellows, to make up my mind," he added, turning to the escort, "and be sure that I will meet your wishes as far as I can."

The men salaamed respectfully, and, moving off to a little distance, sat down in a circle, and were soon occupied in passing the lighted *chillum* from hand to hand in the solemn manner in which natives indulge in the narcotic fumes of tobacco.

"And so, Dhurrumdasa, the end has come," said Mr. Macalpine, turning sadly to the little group of three which surrounded him, "and all the chance of seeing the diamond of the Rajah Doolan is at an end. I think I had better take the offer of the good fellows, who after all have some reason on their side, and let them escort us back to the limits of civilization. Thanks to a merciful Providence, I have still my pension, and work is to be found which will give us a welcome addition to it."

"You are wrong to give way, sahib," returned the Ladâki, respectfully, "and I was wrong to suggest this course of proceeding, which was one only too likely to attract attention. A small party would create much less notice, and we really need be at no pains to give any account of ourselves. The time is now drawing near for the Vanishing Diamond to show itself, and we have but to push on without further delay. Pay the men, make them a present of what goods you do not desire to carry with you, and let us push on to the salt lake; we can camp out and live by our rifles until such times as the stone condescends to show itself."

"Aye, mon! but you are gay handy in gien awa' ither folks property," broke in Rab Dalhousie, with all a Scotchman's customary prudence. "Could ye no mak the chiels tak gudes in lieu o' moneys, sae as ta save a' this great an' fearsome waste? It makes my heart sair ta see gude siller flung awa' in this feckless manner."

"The Bhoot Priest and the reckless Rab Dalhousie are gaining quite a steady mercantile character," cried Donald,

with a bright laugh. "Take Dhurrumdasa's advice, father—get rid of the men. Do you know it seemed quite a burlesque to me to go tramping about the country in search of a diamond with a dozen tag, rag, and bobtail at our heels. It will be quite a relief to hear you say, in the words of General Bombastes—

'Be off, brave army; don't kick up a row.'

We shall be a thousand times freer and more independent alone, and shall have jolly times shooting; besides, when we do get the diamond, if we have no escort we shall have less chance of having our throats cut, for you must allow that the temptation would be a very great one to them."

"The boy is perhaps right, after all," remarked the merchant, thoughtfully.

"I am sure that he is, sahib," said Dhurrumdasa, in a tone of decision.

"And though the laddie will hae his joke at a body," chimed in Rab, "I'll gie him my vote."

All was speedily arranged, the men were paid and made happy with a handsome present from such of the goods as had been saved from the inundation of mud, and that afternoon the two parties separated, the larger going southward, and the other making for the higher grounds of Thibet; and both left without a feeling of regret the blackened spot which showed where the robber and murderer, Kara Kaplân, rested in his unhallowed grave. The clouds had all disappeared, the breeze blew cool and fresh, and all seemed to promise success in this second departure in quest of the Vanishing Diamond. Nature is not always a true prophetess, and many perils yet lay in the path of the little party.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GREAT ROCK-SNAKE.

A WILD rocky ravine with a little branching stream running down the centre, now spreading into a wide shallow and then deepening into a dark pool, rushing by a few trees of the holly species, and fringed with tall rushes whose scarlet tops were strangely reflected in the still water. Upon each side of the ravine the cliffs rose up to a height of some eighty feet,

and at midday a dark shadow fell almost entirely over the still surface of the stream. Upon the right-hand side of the glen was an orifice in the rock, some ten feet in height, and a rough verandah made of dried grass, thatched upon a kind of hurdle, rested upon poles in a slanting direction, and protected the cavern, into which the opening led, from the hot blasts that occasionally swept down the ravine with terrible impetuosity. Under the shelter of a wall of rough stones, which had been built, as it were, upon angles to the entrance, was a clay fireplace, upon which two copper cooking-pots were simmering, and from which a savoury odour exhaled. Donald was seated on a rough stool, glancing every now and then at the cooking, and then casting his eye now and again down the ravine in search of his father and Dhurrumdasa, who had gone off on an expedition in search of game.

"Rab," said the boy, "Rab! are you going to sleep the whole day away? Get up, my noble priest, and fetch some water from the pool."

A loud yawn from the entrance of the cavern was heard, and in a few seconds the ex-priest came out rubbing his eyes and growling out some indistinct words of remonstrance and expostulation. He had discarded his demoniacal attire as a priest of the spirits, and now wore a loose puttoo suit, like that in which the Ladâki usually appeared.

"Ech, Maister Donald," said he, "would it not be better for ye ta let a puir ex-meenister sleep, and no be harling him oot o' his bed ta get sich cauld comfort as *aqua pura*, as the dominie used to call it."

"Come, Rab, no more words," exclaimed the boy. "I'll be bound if it was 'whuskey,' as you call it, we should not have so much grumbling."

"Aweel, onything for a life o' peace and quietness," returned Rab, as, catching up a tin bucket, he lounged down the sloping path that led from the cavern down to the banks of the stream.

Donald took off the tops of the cooking utensils, and a faint smile of satisfaction stole over his countenance as he inhaled the savoury odour of their contents, when all at once a sudden clattering of stones and a crash amongst the brushwood in the face of the cliff above the cavern door was heard, and with a sharp hiss and a heavy thud an enormous rock-snake, some seventeen feet in length, fell with a crash upon the roof of the verandah, dashing it to the ground, and writhing angrily about among the ruins. Strange to say, Donald's first feelings were

those of disappointment at the total destruction of the dinner, the cooking utensils containing which were sent flying in all directions, but a moment's reflection convinced him that he was in a position of the most deadly peril. A turn of the head of the great reptile brought the figure of the boy within range of those small fiery orbs, and the snake, rapidly coiling itself up, remained perfectly motionless with the exception of its protruding tongue, which kept up a continual vibrating quiver. The horrible effluvium which the body of the snake emitted half suffocated him, and the piercing glance of its eyes fascinated him to such a degree, that he hardly dared move hand or foot. His rifle was in the interior of the cave only a few feet from him, but he had not power to stretch out his hand to reach it, and with a slow and serious movement the reptile began to creep stealthily towards him. The hair upon the unhappy boy's head bristled with terror as he felt that a terrible fate was in preparation for him. He knew that these gigantic reptiles were not venomous, but possessed terribly powerful constrictive powers, and he had read of their laying in wait for the mountain sheep, and crushing them to a jelly before making their loathsome meal.

Still the monster crept closer and closer, and Donald, uttering a brief prayer, prepared for a fate which seemed inevitable, when he heard the rush of a heavy body through the air, a rustle of pinions, and one of the gigantic vultures of the hills swooped down, and in another moment had fixed its curved talons in the back of the advancing snake. In an instant the snake coiled and twisted round the body of the bird, which flapped its wings and fought savagely with beak and talon, whilst the whole air was full of pebbles and small pieces of stick which were hurled about in the course of the tremendous struggle that was taking place. As if a spell had been taken off him, the boy sprang to his feet, and crossing by the combatants, came full against Rab Dalhousie, who was gazing with a terrified face at the conflict, hurling him, bucket and all, into the stream beneath.

"Ech, mon!" exclaimed Rab, as he splashed out of the water and held his hand to his eye, which had been severely damaged by the sharp rim of the pail, "what for are ye making this zoological collection wi'out a hint? If I were ye, I wudna be asking the reptiles that creep an' the fouls o' the air tae a flesh meal. What will ye be sayin' to Mr. Macalpine and yon donnert chiel Dhurrumdasa when they come back and are speering for their dinner?"

Donald, however, was so deeply impressed with the imminency of the danger that he had escaped, that he breathed an earnest prayer of thankfulness for his preservation.

Meanwhile the combat was drawing to a close. The tight embrace of the snake had nearly suffocated the bird; but with a sudden and violent effort, and using beak and talons at the same time, it smashed the skull and backbone of the snake, and the spiral coils relaxed in an instant, and with a sharp hiss of agony the reptile stretched itself out in death. The vulture stood staggering by the side of its victim, almost suffocated by the tremendous pressure that had been brought to bear upon it, and then with a hoarse croak of triumph he picked up the writhing reptile in his claws and flew away, with some yards of snake dangling down.

"Mon, but yon bonny bird must ha'e a braw muscle of its ain to carry awa' yon creature like a maircock wad bear aff a wurm," exclaimed the Scotchman. "And a gay gude thing it is that he has taken the uncanny creature awa';—but here comes the gude man Macalpine and the douce-looking Ladâki; an' so while ye are tellin' them that a serpent has jist upset the cooking, I'll jist step down ta the burn and bring up annither pailful o' watter, as whuskey seems to be out o' a' question."

Away bounded the Scotchman, and in another moment Mr. Macalpine and Dhurrumdasa turned a corner of the glen, and Donald, running up to them, recounted the terrible adventure that had befallen him. The scattered fireplace, the overturned cooking-pots, the scales of the serpent and the feathers of the great vulture, which were scattered in front of the cave, bore witness to the truth of his story, and the father shuddered as he thought of the fearful danger to which his son had been exposed during his absence.

"These terrible reptiles," remarked he to Dhurrumdasa, "are usually found in pairs, and I fear that the companion snake will come to look for its partner. We might not find such a useful ally as the vulture to drop down in the nick of time. We might be surprised in our sleep; besides, all our little arrangements for comfort have been destroyed, and it is time for us to be making our way towards the Great Salt Lake."

"You are right, sahib," returned the Ladâki; "and we can pass through the lower belt of the plains where the Tartar villages are, and take a sudden turn up through the range of hills that borders the lake upon the south."

"Is it a move we are makin'?" broke in the Scotchman, suddenly making his appearance with a pail of water in his hand, and perceiving that his three companions were busily engaged in packing up the various articles that were lying about the floor of the cavern, and seeming to be in a great hurry to quit the place that had afforded them so excellent a shelter for nearly a fortnight.

"Yes, Rab," returned Mr. Macalpine, "we are making a move; for this place is no longer tenable, and the sooner we are out of it the better."

"A sairpent has crept into oor Eden—eh?" returned the ex-priest, as he went off to an adjacent cavern that had been turned into a stable for the mules; and in the course of another hour the little party made their way out of the valley where poor Donald's search for the Vanishing Diamond had so nearly been brought to an untimely end.

There were a line of vultures perched upon a high ridge of rocks, and the Ladâki pointed them out to his master, saying, with a grim smile:

"The cobra has, without meaning it, furnished a good dinner to our feathered friends up yonder!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TARTAR SEPULCHRE.

LEAVING the valley, which they now began to look upon with feelings of some repugnance, the four adventurers entered the more cultivated portions of the country. After passing through a few fields covered with the stalks of the late harvest of Indian corn, they pitched their tent by the side of a wooded slope, down which a purling stream ran. Some distance off was a Tartar village, and all round about the camp were quaint little domed edifices with low wooden doors, such as Mr. Macalpine now recollected having seen before. It was a most lovely evening; the sun had not yet sunk to its rest, but the evening breeze had begun to blow, and all nature was peaceful and at rest.

"I'm thinking," said the ex-priest, "that I heard the cry o' the red-legged pairtricks on the ither side o' yon burn, an' they wad mak' a fine addetion ta our supper. Eh, sirs, gin we

could only ha'e a singet tup's head or a real gude haggis, I would na care ta ca' the Emperor o' all the Chinas ma uncle."

"I am afraid we must dispense with such luxuries," returned Mr. Macalpine, with a smile; "but if your mind is upon a brace of partridges, I will see what I can do for you," and taking up a fowling-piece, he sprang lightly across the little stream.

"May I not come with you, father?" asked Donald, rising to his feet, for he was ever eager to join in a sporting exhibition.

"No, my boy," answered the elder Macalpine. "I expect there are only a solitary brace of birds; but if there are more I will call you."

Mr. Macalpine soon disappeared round the slope, and in a few minutes the sharp report of a double-barrelled gun echoed through the still air, and Mr. Macalpine's voice was heard exclaiming:

"Only two birds, my boy; I shall be back directly."

A quarter of an hour, or perhaps twenty minutes, had elapsed, and Rab Dalhousie was sighing over the prospect of the "pair-tricks," as he called them, being too late for supper, when a sharp scream was heard, followed by a low moaning sound.

"What is that?" exclaimed Dhurrumdasa, rising from the cooking-pot over which he had been bending. "Did you not hear a cry?"

"A nasty eldricht yell," added the ex-priest; "I jalouse that there is something uncanny aboot."

Donald said nothing, but snatching a rifle, started away in the direction which his father had taken. The two men remaining in the camp gazed at each other uneasily, as if they hardly knew what course it would be best to adopt. All at once Donald's voice, raised in piteous appeal for help, struck upon their ears, and without further hesitation they ran in the direction from whence the sound proceeded.

After Mr. Macalpine had picked up the birds, he walked across the field to the little building which has been before alluded to. It was a low structure, with mud walls, and a domed roof with a gilded spike on the top, and a heavy wooden door which appeared to open outwards. Mr. Macalpine stepped up to it, and struck it lightly with the butt-end of his gun. Receiving no response, he rapped once more, and then, growing impatient, laid his hand upon the iron hasp and pulled the door towards him. It yielded with some little resistance; a series of sharp tramps were heard, then a rapid

whirring sound, and Mr. Macalpine staggered back with three long barbed arrows planted in his breast, and another in the lower part of his neck, whilst four more whistled past him and buried themselves in the earth beyond. The pain and surprise caused the unhappy man to utter that shriek of agony which had alarmed the camp, and he fell heavily backwards with the blood flowing profusely from his wounds. A feeling of deadly faintness crept over him, from which he was aroused by finding his head raised on Donald's arm, and the boy's eyes gazing into his face with a look of wild entreaty and agonized wonder.

"Father," exclaimed he, in a voice broken by sobs, "what has happened? Tell me who has done this?"

The wounded man opened his lips; but his tongue could only frame the word "water," and a dull ashen hue was spreading over his features.

At that moment the Ladâki and the Scotchman appeared with wonder and terror depicted upon their countenances.

"Water! bring water quickly!" exclaimed the boy; and the ex-priest dashed back to the little stream, whilst Dhurrumdasa hastened to relieve the boy of his father's weight.

Bending over the prostrate form of his master, the Ladâki, with all the care and tenderness of a woman, extracted the arrows from the wounds, an operation which drew many deep groans from the sufferer; and Rab at that moment returning with the water, a little of the cooling fluid was forced through Mr. Macalpine's lips.

"They shot at me," murmured he, faintly, "from inside the hut, directly I opened the door; and yet I have seen no one come out."

The Ladâki gazed for a moment at the small building, and then, with a deep sigh, resumed his task of staunching the wounds of the injured man.

Donald, however, with a flash of anger in his face, cocked his rifle and dashed into the empty house, but returned in a few moments with a face of disappointment, saying:

"Why, the house is entirely empty!"

"Yes," answered Dhurrumdasa, with a sad smile, "of course it is. I never thought of warning the sahib of the danger of meddling with these little detached buildings, as I thought he was acquainted with their use."

"I was, I was," muttered the dying man, but I had quite forgotten; there is no one to blame but myself. I had forgotten that the Tartars bury their dead in those small build

ings, and, by an ingenious system of wires and catches, fix bent bows which discharge their arrows against any one who opens the door; and it is owing to their respect for the dead that I have to-day received my death-wound."

"Oh, do not say that, father!" exclaimed Donald, bursting into a flood of tears. "Surely you are not going to leave me now?"

"I have no choice, my dear boy," returned the wretched man. "I feel that my lungs have been pierced, for a feeling of suffocation is stealing over me; so listen to me whilst I can speak. I am as good as a dead man; and Donald, my dear boy, my pension dies with me, and you will be left as the only stay and support of your mother and sister. At present they are both beyond the reach of poverty, but the time will come when they will need your help. Promise me that you will continue the search for the Vanishing Diamond. You are strong, wise, and sagacious beyond your years; promise me, my dear boy, that you will endeavour to carry out my wishes as I have explained them to you?"

"Father, my dear father," cried the boy, "I will do all that you desire, but how shall I hope to succeed without your advice and assistance?"

"I leave you with two trusty friends," murmured the dying man, feebly extending his hands towards the Ladâki and the Scotchman. "Promise me, my dear friends, that you will not desert my boy, but will aid him in the quest that is to bring peace and comfort to his mother's declining years."

"I will never leave him as long as he requires my services," said Dhurrumdasa, solemnly.

"And I," added the Scotchman, "would sooner let ma richt hond wither than gae bock frae the son of a gude richt-minded mon like you."

A transient gleam of satisfaction passed over the dying man's face, and clasping his son's hands, he moved his lips as if in inward prayer.

By degrees even this movement ceased, his hand grew cold in the grasp of his son, his head fell back upon the Ladâki's shoulder, and with a faint sigh the soul passed away from its prison in the withered body.

With a wild cry the boy threw himself upon the breast of the dead man, and gave vent to his feelings in a bitter outburst of sobs. The men respected his grief, and withdrew to a little distance until the first outburst of anguish had passed away.

Beckoning to the Scotchman, Dhurrumdasa retired to the

camp, and taking spade and pick, set to work to hollow out a grave beneath the fragrant boughs of a wide-spreading cedar; and when that melancholy task was performed he returned to the spot where the boy was still praying over the body of his dead father.

The first anguish was over, and he seemed dazed and stunned by the calamity that had so suddenly befallen him.

Dhurrumdasa touched him lightly on the shoulder. "It is time," said he softly, "to place your father beyond the reach of the ravenous beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Leave us for a moment, and the Scotchman and I will compose his poor limbs for sepulture."

Mechanically the boy rose to his feet and obeyed.

The men swathed the body in a scarlet blanket, and then calling Donald, laid it reverently in the grave, and the Ladâki, taking a small book from his bosom, handed it to Donald, who in a faltering voice read the beautiful service for the burial of the dead. Then the earth was heaped over the prostrate form, and a square of stones neatly raised above the grave, and lastly Rab Dalhousie carved the symbol of our salvation upon the trunk of the mighty cedar tree whose branches hung so lovingly over a Christian's grave in the far-away lands of heathendom.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

FAIN would Donald have lingered by the grave of his father, but the Ladâki and Rab Dalhousie urged him to leave a spot which was to him but too full of cruel reflections; and the boy, though his heart was torn at the idea of quitting the grave, yielded to their solicitations, and the little camp was soon again in motion, and the adventurers passed over many miles of country during the long hours of the moonlit night. Many a belated villager drew back with feelings of awe and affright as they saw the dark forms of the travellers moving in line towards the inhospitable regions of the north—for it had been urged in solemn conclave that the diamond seekers should at once proceed to the shores of the great salt lake and there await the date upon which the precious stone invariably showed itself. The direct track, however, was still several days' journey distant,

and to their surprise they were greeted with marks of great disfavour through many of the villages and small towns through which they had to pass, and in some instances they were saluted with showers of stones and refused permission to make any halt at all. As they always paid liberally for every kind of refreshment, and were liberal in their presents to the headmen and the elders of the village, this conduct surprised them a good deal. It was some days before the mystery was solved, for an old man, whose grandson had been cured of the tooth-ache by some chloroform, crept up to the camp by night and told them that a strange foreign-looking man with a dark face and long black hair was moving ahead of them, and was spreading the report that a band of sorcerers and magicians was passing through the country spreading the seeds of famine and pestilence, and that unless they turned them from their doors they would repent it to the very last day of their lives.

In a moment the thought flashed across the minds of all three, that it was the half-caste Andrew De Cruz who was playing them this cruel trick; and Rab Dalhousie, who still retained his spiked war-club, shook it threateningly in the air, and vowed that he would "gie the loon a skinfu' o' sair banes," the first time he came across him.

"My good friends," said Donald, "there is no use in pushing forward upon the road that we are following, for the enemy will ever keep just ahead of us and blast our reputation with every step that he takes, and we must meet subtlety by subtlety and craft by craft."

Since his father's sad and tragical ending, Donald had seemed to feel the gravity of his position and the deep responsibility that had fallen upon his shoulders, and it was only after he had consulted with his two friends as to future movements, that he allowed the feelings of boyhood to gain an ascendancy over him.

"You are right, sahib," returned Dhurrumdasa, who now always applied to the son the title of respect that he had always given to the father. "We must get out of the path of this snake, who will endeavour to wreak upon the son the grudge that he imagined that he owed to the father; but fortunately I know a track by which we can make a wide detour and yet reach our destination in plenty of time."

"The ill-faured chiel will be like to split his wame in black rage gin he finds that we are nae following in his track," laughed the ex-priest. "Weel, weel, it ul sairve him oot, the loon, this time."

Scarcely had this arrangement been come to, than the baggage was packed, and the little party retraced their steps for some miles until they came to a slope of loose stones very sharp and apparently impracticable, which led into the interior of the hills.

"It looks steep," remarked the Ladâki, "but there is only about three hundred yards of it, and our loads are not heavy; it is worth while making the attempt."

With a good deal of caution, much stumbling, and a frequent readjustment of loads, the difficult ascent was conquered, and Donald and his little party found themselves on a broad plateau without a single sign of human habitation or the slightest vestige of cultivation. The ground was strewn with small fragments of rock which glittered with particles of mica and iron pyrites, whilst the only signs of life were the black vultures of the Himalayas, floating in the blue empyrean high above the crags which could be seen far away to the north.

Almost in silence the diamond seekers continued their course through this wild and desolate region, subsisting entirely upon the stock of flour that they carried with them, and which they kneaded into the thin unleavened cakes which are known as *chupatties*, and baked on an iron plate over a gentle fire.

No living creatures were to be seen on the ground, only where the stones which covered it had been kicked aside, fat loathsome black scorpions, whose resting places were thus invaded, crept slowly away, erecting their barbed tails with a gesture of anger and defiance.

At length the Ladâki, with an exultant smile, pointed to a huge mass of black basaltic rock which rose directly on the horizon, and informed his companions that it was from the centre of these that the Vanishing Diamond was wont to appear upon the appointed day.

"At last, then," said Donald, with a sigh, "we have come to the spot that we have been so eager to attain, and my poor father will not be here to partake of our triumph—for triumph I hope and feel that it will be."

"Do not raise your expectations too high, sahib," urged the Ladâki. "Many, I believe, have tried to obtain the Rajah Doolân's diamond, and failed; and then remember another twelve months will elapse before we can look upon its face again."

"You surely do not believe in that tale, Dhurrumdasa," said Donald, gazing earnestly into the Ladâki's face. "You know that such things as magic and enchantment are all false."

"Sahib," said Dhurrumdasa, earnestly, "these very eyes

have seen it pouring its rays of effulgence from the centre of the black rock."

"But mon," urged Rab Dalhousie, "ha'e ye no read ony buiks on mind and matter, and do ye no ken ony value in the physioligie of nature and natural science, and that a diamond can na more vanish and come again than can ony ither bodie wioot sentience or power of motion?"

"Bravo, Dominie," exclaimed Donald, with a laugh, "you have certainly benefited by the time you were engaged as usher at a school, and are qualified to argue matters with all the wise men of Thibet. Only show me the diamond, and I will undertake that it shall not escape us."

"You shall be obeyed, sahib," returned Dhurrumdasa, with his customary deference; "and if we push on we shall be by the shores of the great salt lake by this evening. Only I should advise our not camping too near to it, for some of its inhabitants are not very desirable neighbours."

Donald stared at him in some surprise, but asked no further questions, and, urging his pony to a quicker pace, led the way in the direction of the mass of black basalt that now towered above them.

The ground now began to assume a difficult aspect, being composed of yellow mud, through the sun-baked crust of which the feet of the mules and ponies every now and then broke, frightening the animals terribly. A thick coating of salt covered this crust, which, under the influence of the sun, had assumed strange and unpleasant shapes, which added much to the singularity of the aspect of the landscape. Beyond this morass, which extended for nearly half a mile, was the great salt lake, the waters of which were of a dusky hue, and, as it seemed, impossible to be illuminated by even the powerful rays of an Eastern sun. A chain of ten hills ran round the northern and eastern shores of the lake, and on the western side rose that towering mass of black basalt in which the diamond was reputed to show itself.

The Ladâki, now pushing on to the front, led the way to a small round elevation some four hundred yards from the waters of the lake.

"Here," said he, "we can camp in safety, and I think that after you have spent a night by the shores of the lake you will thank me for the precautions that I have advised you to take."

"Be it so," answered Donald. "I suppose there is no chance of getting any game about here, for I am getting awfully tired of *chupatties*."

"There are wild sheep on yonder hills," returned the Ladâki, with a wave of his hand in the direction indicated; "but you forget that we have but little time for hunting, for the day after to-morrow is the 24th of November, and it is on that day that we must look upon the Vanishing Diamond, or give up all hope of it for another year. So that, I fear, sahib, you must give up all hopes of roast mutton, and keep faithful to plain *chupatties*."

Rab Dalhousie made a wry face at this announcement, he often had boasted of his fondness for the oaten cake and the bannock, but his soul revolted against the diet to which the Ladâki had so pitilessly condemned him. There was, however, no help for it, and with an air of resignation he busied himself in some of the requisite duties of the camp.

"Why, there are fush in tha loch," cried he suddenly, as a shoal of large fish leaped out of the water as though in a great state of excitement.

"Aye, and something else," whispered the Ladâki, pointing to the water, from which a huge pair of jaws emerged and began to devour the fish right and left. "I could not advise you to go down to the edge of the lake, for the creature that you have seen, and a few more terrible denizens of these waters, would as soon make a meal of you as of those poor finny creatures."

"To-morrow," remarked Donald, "I had intended to explore the basaltic rocks, but the water seems to wash their feet, and we have no boat. How can we manage that?"

"A fairly broad terrace, which almost seems the work of human hands, runs along their base," returned the Ladâki; "but you will find the face of the rock is so perpendicular that you will never be able to reach the spot from which the diamond shines forth."

"Well, we must do the best we can," answered Donald. "I think that there can be no harm in taking a look round to-morrow; and the next day, you doubting Dhurrumdasa, you will see that we shall have the diamonds in our hands."

"Fervently I pray that you may," answered the Ladâki, and, after a little more conversation, Dhurrumdasa and the Scotchman retired to the tent, it having been settled that Donald should keep the first watch.

The boy sat himself down with his face toward the lake and his rifle across his knee, gazing upon the vast mass of black rock in which, on the second night from the present, he hoped to see the diamond blaze forth in all its radiant effulgence.

A sudden gust of wind swept across the lake and turned its waters into small waves, which glittered with a strange and almost supernatural lustre.

Suddenly a column of water was upheaved, and then a huge scaly back, which glowed with prismatic colour, rose above the centre of the water.

The portion of the aquatic creature seemed like the bottom of some inverted boat, with a huge row of spikes along it; suddenly it rolled over and displayed an enormous head, armed with rows of gigantic teeth, and once again driving up the waters of the lake into sheets of foam. Whether this act was meant as a challenge, or whether it invited some other huge denizen of the lake, it is impossible to say, but with a huge swirl and eddy another immense reptile of the Saurian species dashed at the creature that had first showed itself, and a terrible contest commenced at once. The huge creatures bit and tore at each other, and lashed the waters into billows of foam with their tails, blowing and snorting all the while in a hideous manner. The heads of other monsters rose from the water and gazed with lack-lustre eyes at the battle.

Strange noises were heard all along the shores of the lake, and a purple hue soon tinged the salt water and the combatants. At length the last comer seemed to have been routed, and, disengaging itself by a violent wrench from the grasp of its adversary, it made for the shore with all the speed that its unwieldy proportions would permit.

The victor followed for some distance in pursuit, and then with a loud snort of triumph swam back to the centre of the lake. His return seemed a signal for a general engagement; in an instant the lake was alive with hideous monsters rending and tearing each other with the utmost fury.

This terrible conflict extended far into the night, and Donald was too much fascinated to withdraw his eyes or to arouse his companions.

At length, as if in horror, the moon hid itself behind a deep cloud, and after a time the sounds of battle became hushed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXPLORATIONS.

At length, as dawn appeared, Dhurrumdasa and his companion emerged from the tent, and the former gently upbraided the

young sahib for not having roused them from their slumbers to take their share of the watch.

Donald, however, protested that he was not in the least fatigued, and eagerly inquired the way to the terrace which ran along the face of the rock.

"There is little use in going there, sahib," returned the Ladâki, "for it was from there I saw the diamond shining above me, and the spot from which its rays seemed to glow was at least one hundred and twenty feet above my head; the face of the rock is smooth and slippery as glass, without even foothold for a little bird, and there is not a tree within miles from which we could manufacture ladders."

"How high do you think that the rock is altogether?" asked Donald, after a short pause.

"About one hundred and eighty feet," answered the Ladâki, measuring the mass of basalt with his eye.

"That is to say that the spot where the diamond shows itself is only some sixty feet from the summit," returned Donald, quickly, "therefore we must make our attempt from the top."

"Do ye think that we are like the great eagles an' can flee awa' ta ony height we like?" asked Rab Dalhousie.

"There is no flying required," answered Donald, with a light laugh; "all these hills on the two sides of the lake run up to the sides of the giant mass of basalt which stands in the centre, and seem to reach within thirty or forty feet of the top of the central mass of rock. Let us bend our way thither; we can easily carry the requisite amount of strong cord with us, and with a crow-bar we can make a secure position from which we can descend the face of the rock. We must all then go, as our load will not be a light one, and we can leave the mules and ponies sufficient fodder for their use until we return."

The Ladâki and the Scotchman agreed, and in the course of ten minutes or so the explorers set out carrying several coils of tough and strong rope, a strong crow-bar and a pick-axe.

To some extent Donald's idea had been a correct one, and the low hills that ran along the shores of the lake on the eastern side led them within some thirty feet of the tower of black basalt, but though there ran some corrugations which served as holds and resting places for the feet and hands, it was fully two hours before our adventurers gained the summit.

When, however, this was accomplished and the tools handed up, they began to make a careful inspection of the spot upon which they found themselves.

The mass of basalt ran back as far as the eye could reach,

and presented a smooth and unbroken surface almost polished in its appearance.

Beneath them lay the great salt lake, its waters looking so calm and still that Donald could hardly believe that the combat of subaqueous reptiles that he had witnessed the previous night had been anything but a terrible nightmare.

"Well, sahib," exclaimed Dhurrumdasa, as he wiped the perspiration that streamed from his forehead, "what are your next commands?"

"Hard ones, I fear," answered the boy; "we must drive the crow-bar some three feet into the rock to form a secure hold for the rope."

"Deed, sirs," broke in Rab Dalhousie, "ma vera arms ache at the thocht, but I'll ne'er turn ma back on wark, especially when there is honour and profit on the ither side o' it."

Dhurrumdasa smiled his usual melancholy smile, and seizing the iron instrument with all his herculean strength, the hard stone flew in splinters and the sparks flashed up with every fresh stroke, until at length the Ladâki desisted after having penetrated fully six inches into the solid rock.

"*Spabash!*" ("Bravo!"), cried Donald, clapping the exhausted man upon the back; "and now, Rab, let us see what you can do for the honour of old Scotland."

"Auld Scotland for ever!" cried Rab, grasping the bar and striking it with such fury upon the rock that it leapt clean out of his hands, and flying over his head, left him gazing with a look of comic amazement upon his features.

"Hech, sirs," continued he, recovering himself, "yon was a braw strike and worthy o' the Land o' Cakes!" then jumping actively after the receding implement, he began again with a little more precaution.

Though not equal to the Ladâki in muscular vigour, Rab worked well; but when poor Donald tried, his unskilled hand effected but little, and Dhurrumdasa with a laugh bade him stand aside and the matter should soon be completed.

When the crow-bar had descended nine inches into the solid rock, it appeared that a sufficient leverage had been obtained to bear the weight of the explorer who was to descend the face of the cliff by aid of the rope, which was soon firmly twisted round the bar, firmly wedged in an upright position by means of small pieces of rock rammed tightly into the sides of the orifice. A cross-bar was then adjusted to the other end of the rope, and all was ready for the descent.

And now a short discussion arose as to who should have the risk

of the descent; but Donald closed it at length by declaring that not only was he the chief of the expedition, but that he was the lightest, and that it would require even then two strong men to haul him up from the depth to which he was about to descend.

Doffing their outer garments, the men placed them on the edge of the cliff so that the rope might run no risk of grazing against the sharp edge of the rock.

The brave boy then grasping the rope above his head, and seating himself astride upon the cross piece, gave the signal to lower away, and in another second he was suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, between heaven and earth.

At first he was so occupied with the novelty of his situation, and the necessity of warding himself off with one arm from the face of the rock against which he was continually in danger of being dashed, that he had but little time to look about him; now, however, that he became more accustomed to the peril of his position, he began to take more notice of the strange locality in which he found himself.

He noticed that the face of the rock had been scraped and smoothed by the hand of man until it was as polished as the black glass out of which buttons are manufactured, and that in many spots were engraved mysterious symbols utterly invisible from below.

Slowly and carefully he was lowered, but he took good care not to cast his eye below him, lest his head should grow dizzy and his hands relax their grasp.

Once when a sudden gust of wind caught him and whirled him out from the face of the rock, there flashed across his eyes the waters of the great salt lake, and he pictured to himself the hideous monsters that lurked in its depths and his probable fate if the rope parted and he was hurled into its bosom, but by a violent effort he calmed his senses and bent his mind upon his quest.

His courage was soon rewarded, for at that moment he perceived in the face of the rock an orifice perfectly circular in form and about twelve inches in diameter.

Shouting to the Ladâki and the Scotchman to cease lowering, he found himself stationary, and again raising his voice, asked the Ladâki if he had reached the spot where the Vanishing Diamond was usually visible. Soon Dhurrumdasa's head peered cautiously over the edge of the cliff, and after a cautious inspection the Ladâki answered him that he had reached the exact spot.

Swinging himself close to the wall of rock, Donald thrust his

arm as far into the orifice as he could; finding nothing, and his strength beginning to fail him, he reluctantly gave the signal to be hauled up again.

With the aid of the rope the descent from the basaltic ridge was easy enough, and in an hour and a half's time they were back again in camp, leaving the rope securely fixed to facilitate their unfinished operations on the morrow—for it was on the night of that momentous day, the 24th of November, that the coveted Vanishing Diamond which Donald had determined to make his own in obedience to his father's last injunctions, was reported to show itself.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF NOVEMBER.

THE morning of the eventful day rose dark and gloomy; thick clouds had gathered over the hill tops and snow had begun to fall.

The waters of the lake had assumed a dull greyish hue, and ever and anon a wave rolled in and broke with thunder upon the shore, as though the vast saurians that inhabited its depths had resumed their internecine strife, and were engaged in another sanguinary combat such as Donald had witnessed upon the night of his first watch.

Not a ray of sunlight was visible, and the great basaltic rock stood up black and threatening against the ashen sky. Every now and then a sharp penetrating blast swept over the plateau, hurling the half-frozen snow with stinging force against the hands and faces of those who had not yet taken shelter.

The diamond seekers were huddled together for the sake of warmth in their tent, for they had been unable, owing to the inclemency of the weather, to kindle a fire, and were discussing their plan of campaign—for the eventful day had by this time arrived.

"We must attack it from the summit," remarked Donald, decisively; "the only question is to ascertain when the diamond shows itself, and whether its radiance can be seen from above."

"Sahib, its light shines out like the most brilliant lamp, and extends far away into the black night," answered the Ladâki.

"You may have thought so, my good friend," replied

Donald, "because you only perceived this strange phenomenon from the lower ground; but unless we want to linger in this horrible region for another twelve months, we must neglect no precaution. Of course it is settled that I shall make the descent; there need be no more question about that."

"Na, laddie, na," said the Scotchman, "my hairt misga' me sair when I saw ye swingin' at the end of that wee bit rope, and I felt that we were but a pack of cowardly loons for letting a laddie act when grown-up men held back."

"He is right," answered Dhurrumdasa, solemnly; "we must not let you risk certain death again. I or the Scotchman will make the descent."

"I tell you that it is impossible," cried the boy, starting from his sitting position and stamping his feet impatiently upon the ground. "It would be impossible for me to draw up or let down either of you by my own unaided exertions. One of us must remain facing the rock, and that one, I promise you, shall not be I."

"What do you mean?" asked both the men.

"Dhurrumdasa," asked Donald, "do you think that you could let me down and draw me up without aid or contrivance?"

The only reply of the Ladâki was to stretch out his brawny arms before him and contemplate them with an air of the most perfect satisfaction.

"Very well," returned Donald, smiling at the confidence which the Ladâki displayed in his own herculean powers. "Then that is all settled."

"You, Rab, must remain here on the watch, and as soon as the diamond shines out from its abiding place in the heart of the rock, you must fire two shots to give notice of its appearance, and I will at once make the descent, and I fervently hope to secure the coveted treasure in search of which my poor father lost his life."

"It mislikes me sair," muttered the Scotchman. "Why should we na keep thegither? The Ladâki says that he is sure it is to be seen from above, and twa stout chiels are no too mony to handle the rope. Let me gae wi' you, maister Donald; I do na ask for any share in the proceeds, I do all from a free hairt." He added, with the customary prudence of his race: "Should ye wish ta mak' me a wee bit present I will na say that I will hurt your feelings by saying 'Na.'"

"You are an honest man!" exclaimed the Ladâki, stepping

up to Rab, and giving him such an approving slap on the back that the ex-priest winced and furtively rubbed the afflicted portion of his body. "But let us do as the young sahib proposes. With the purchase of the crowbar up there, I believe that I could raise or lower a young elephant. See how strong I am!" And before the Scotchman could place himself at a safe distance, the Ladâki had caught him up with one hand and raised him high above his head.

"Pit me down! pit me down, Mr. Dhurrumdasa!" pleaded Rab. "I am no doubtin' your muscular strength and development, nor ha'e I ony fear for mysel'; but I am sair afraid that ye may strain yersel' in some unco' manner."

The Ladâki laughed, and placed the Scotchman on the ground again with the utmost tenderness.

"Well, I hope the matter is all settled now," said Donald. "Rab will remain here and fire the signal-shots, whilst Dhurrumdasa and I will ascend the peak and do our best."

The boy was evidently so determined that it seemed to be useless to offer further opposition, and so matters were left as he had proposed.

Towards the afternoon Donald and the Ladâki left the camp, with many a "Gude speed" shouted after them by the stentorian lungs of the canny Scot, who danced a wild measure and flourished his rifle when they turned their heads to look at him. The climb was not so perilous or difficult, for they had firmly secured the rope to a huge boulder at the foot of the basaltic rock, and with this means of assistance they speedily reached the summit, and then drew after them the blankets and coverings with which they resisted the chill evening air. There was not much more daylight left, and the two adventurers carefully examined the rope and the cross piece of wood, as well as the crowbar, to see that all was firm and secure. They then ate a frugal meal and sat down by each other in silence.

The Ladâki's mind was chiefly occupied by fears for his young master's safety, and gloomy anticipations that some evil might befall him. Long and fervently he prayed that all might turn out well and that all danger might be averted.

Donald's thoughts ran in a different route. He was proud and happy in the feeling that he was endeavouring to accomplish the quest which his father with his dying breath had bequeathed him, and he longed for the moment when he might place the stone, which carried with it his mother's and his sister's futures, in their hands.

They were now to be disturbed in their reflections by a flock of kites and buzzards that swept down upon them, evidently judging from their motionless appearance that they had ceased to exist and were fit objects for a meal. As soon, however, as they discovered their mistake, the carrion birds whirred away with shrill cries of anger and disappointment.

It was now perfectly dark; the wind had risen to a violent pitch, and an occasional unearthly bellow from the lake showed that its monster denizens were awake and in search of their prey.

"It is nearly time for the diamond to show itself, Dhurrumdasa," whispered Donald, as he bent constantly over the cliff and peered into the darkness below.

"It has appeared, sahib," answered the Ladâki, solemnly; and as he spoke two bright flashes were seen from the camp, followed in a very brief space by the faint report of two rifle shots.

"It is time, my faithful friend," said the boy, grasping the Ladâki's hand, who turned away and passed his hand over his eyes as though to conceal a sudden burst of emotion. "Remember my life is in your hands, that depends upon your skill and courage."

Again he grasped the Ladâki's hand, and in another moment was swinging over the precipice, with the chill night air whistling round him.

Backwards and forwards he swayed, now gyrating wildly, and at other times dashing with terrible force against the smooth sides of the cliff. He could hear the bellowing of the monsters in the lake, the shrill scream of the birds of night disturbed from their roosting places, when all at once he found himself in the midst of a circle of dazzling light. From the orifice which he had before noticed shot a full stream of brilliant white flame: at least it seemed so to him, though its rays were perfectly marvellous. He was exactly in front of the circular aperture in the cliff, and though dazed and half-blinded by the rare effulgence, he plunged his head with a cry of delight into the spot where the diamond seemed to be lurking within his reach. Further and further he pushed forward his fingers, in doubt lest his arm should not be long enough to grasp the coveted prize. At length his fingers passed over a hard globular substance smooth as glass. He tried to grasp it, but to his inexpressible dismay it slowly recoiled.

The light went out, and he was left swinging in the air

in a darkness which seemed the more insupportable from the brilliant light which had preceded it.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BROKEN BRIDGE.

DEEP despair reigned in the little camp that night. Donald was half mad with grief and despair at his failure, when he actually felt himself on the point of success in securing the coveted prize. Dhurrumdasa almost carried the moist form of the disappointed youth down the rocks and supported his tottering footsteps to the tent, where Rab Dalhousie received them with a shout of welcome in anticipation of their success. As soon, however, as he learned the true state of the case he expressed the utmost sympathy, and assisted the Ladâki in doing all he could to soothe the feelings of the almost heart-broken lad.

All that Donald seemed desirous of doing was to get away from a neighbourhood in which he had experienced so cruel a blow, and accordingly the Scotchman went out and prospected about for some suitable spot. Towards evening he returned radiant with joy, and told his companions that he had discovered a delightful spot, well wooded and with plenty of water, some seven miles away.

By the next morning Donald had in a great measure recovered from his state of prostration, and assisted in packing-up and moving from the vicinity of the lake and its hideous inhabitants.

The ex-Priest of the Bhoots had shown his sagacity in selecting the site of the camp. Around were the tracks of the wild sheep (*Ovis ammon*) and the gootul, a Himalayan chamois, whilst in the leafy recesses of the wood could be heard the short, sharp sound emitted by the kukker, or barking deer.

"There will be no lack of good flesh meat here," remarked the Ladâki, "and the young sahib will regain his spirits when he is once more tramping on the hills in search of game."

"Perhaps so," remarked Donald, with a faint smile. "At present I hardly feel up to hunting."

"But, laddie, we maun ha'e some flesh meat," broke in the Scotchman; "my whole hairt loups up at the thocht of fresh collops and a braw gigot o' mutton."

"My dear friends," said Donald, with a sudden effort, "I must no longer disguise my intentions from you. I ask your assistance but for a short time longer. I will not ask you to spend another twelve months with me in this desolate region, but I am determined to make one more effort to secure this strange and mysterious stone. How or by what means I shall do so I do not know, but I feel that Providence will open a way for me, and that in the end my poor father's last wishes will be accomplished. I want you to help me to prepare some salt provisions—thank goodness that will not be difficult—and then to thatch over my tent, so that I may have some shelter against the storms of winter; and then take what you like of the goods and make your way to your own homes. I"—and here his eyes flashed with a beam of inspiration—"will remain here and do my best to dive to the inmost depths of this strange mystery."

He paused for a reply, but he had little time to wait.

"I have no home," said the Ladâki, sadly; "all my kith and kin have cast me out on account of the religion I now profess; but had I a hundred homes and as many families waiting to welcome me, I would never desert the son of my old master in his time of trouble and perplexity. So say no more about my leaving you, sahib; for whilst life lingers in his frame Dhurrumdasa will never desert you, be the end what it may."

"And I, laddie," said the Scotchman, hastily, "though I weel know that the punishment of the deserter hangs ower my head should I again set foot on British territory, would gladly go there if you bade me; but if you think that a brither Scot will desert ye, laddie, in this sair strait, ye do not ken the kindly feeling of Scotchmen for Scotchmen, which is one that grows stronger and stronger in a foreign land."

Donald was so overcome by this spontaneous outburst from both the men, that for a few moments he was unable to say a word; then, extending his hands right and left, he grasped the outstretched palms of his companions.

"Thanks, my brave and trusty friends," said he. "With such valuable and disinterested aid I feel that success is assured. It grieves my heart to detain you in this wilderness, but let us make one more effort, and if we fail, then I shall be the first to say, 'Let us bend our way homewards.'"

For several days following the little camp was a scene of the utmost activity. A wall of loose stones and earth was built up round the tent, and cross poles, lashed in a slanting direction,

were thatched with sods, forming a secure protection against the winter that was now rapidly coming on. A rough hut for cooking purposes was also erected near at hand, and a stable built for the animals. Rab Dalhousie, who seemed to have no fear of the terrible lake, made several journeys there, and returned with ample supplies of salt, and the Ladâki made hundreds of sprugies of horsehair, with which he captured the *chikore* (grey partridge) and the silver hare of the mountains. Rude kegs were made, and the provisions carefully salted down; but this supply was totally insufficient to meet the requirements of the long winter.

"Rab and I," said the Ladâki, "will have a good day's work cutting down and stocking fuel; and suppose you, sahib, go out with your gun and see if you cannot pick up one or two of the ghoorul whose tracks I noticed yesterday amongst the hills over yonder."

"Hech, Maister Donald, joost gae oot for a day's gunning. I'm clean mad for a braw roast; and we can salt down the remainder."

Donald had been working hard at the camp, and the idea of a day's shooting seemed very pleasant to him.

"If you will not think me selfish," began he, in a hesitating tone of voice, "I confess that I should like a ramble over the hills; and perhaps, as you say, I may be able to pick up some game."

"Gang awa', laddie, gang awa'; it is joost as much a part of your duty ta bring in the gude mutton an' beef as it is ours ta split the wood for oor winter fodder."

Donald, moved by these arguments, shouldered his rifle and set off, turning round once or twice on his way and waving his hand before he had turned the corner that hid the camp from his view.

He found plenty of traces of the wild sheep, and higher up in the rocky portions the footprints of the ghoorul. For a long time, however, he saw no other sign of game, until he crept cautiously up a slope and passed over the brow of the hill. He saw a flock of ghoorul feeding at a few hundred yards beneath him. Drawing hastily backwards, he made a wide *détour*, and contrived to get within eighty yards of the great goats; and then, feeling that they might take the alarm, he rested his rifle upon a rock, and, taking a steady aim, fired. A fine buck roller over, shot through the heart, and as the herd bounded away in terror Donald fired his second barrel, and to his unspeakable delight another ghoorul fell headlong, but

immediately sprang up again and made off, but with one of his hind legs evidently rendered useless by the bullet.

Reloading his rifle as he ran, the boy started in pursuit; but the animal went on with extreme fleetness, though now and then it halted and betrayed evident signs of exhaustion. Encouraged by these symptoms of weakness, Donald went on until he reached the top of the range along which the wounded animal was bounding. A separate column of rock, united with the rest of the chain of hills by the fallen trunk of a tree, was some four hundred yards off, and the creature, rapidly crossing this impromptu bridge, seemed to fall in a heap on the top of the semi-detached rock. Cautiously trying the stability of the bridge with the butt end of his rifle, Donald advanced across the frail bridge, and then, summoning up all his courage, sped lightly across it, and in another moment stood by the wounded creature, which made a vain but unavailing effort to rise.

Drawing his hunting-knife, he bent over the injured creature and speedily put it out of its pain, when a sudden crash behind him, and a series of sounds like some heavy body falling from rock to rock, caused him to spring up and gaze behind him with a feeling of curiosity and anxiety. The trunk of the tree over which he had passed had disappeared, and a deep abyss separated him from the ridge of rocks, far too wide for him to leap back and regain the spot from which he had jumped. He was imprisoned on the top of a pillar some twelve feet square, with fathomless precipices on all sides of him; but what added more to his terror and dismay was that on the other side, with a mocking smile upon his dark features, was the figure of the half-caste, Andrew De Cruz.

"And so, young fellow, we meet again, do we?"

"Yes, but on different terms," retorted the boy, firmly, as he cocked his rifle and held it ready for use. "You cowardly murderer, why should I not shoot you down where you stand?"

The same idea seemed to pass through the half-caste's brain, for with an active bound he placed himself behind a projecting rock, and from that safe retreat exclaimed—

"Well, young fellow, I thank you for your advice, well-meant or otherwise; but now that I am secure from your powder and lead, let us critically review your position, which to me seems rather an unpleasant one."

CHAPTER XXI.

THROUGH THE CLOUDS.

DONALD made no reply to this taunt, but gazed around eagerly to see if he could devise any means of escape.

"Unless you have the wings of a dove," sneered the half-caste, with a harsh laugh, "I can see nothing else to help you in getting out of the position in which you have so foolishly thrust yourself. I have been watching you for days, but you all kept so close together that there was no chance of having a crack with you; but to-day I felt certain of you, and chance has given me a grand opportunity of revenge. You will perish of starvation and thirst upon this pinnacle of rock, and the vultures and kites will pick your bones, and that old villain, your father, will long look for the return of his son. By the way, has he got tired of the wild-goose chase after the diamond, and gone home, leaving you to run all the risks and incur all the danger? If he has, it is just like his cold and selfish heart."

"My father is dead," answered the boy, a sob breaking his voice as he thought of the loss he had sustained, "and I will thank you not to insult his memory."

"What, the old bear dead! He! he!" laughed the half-caste; "and the poor little cub continues the search for the sake of mammy! This is too good a joke! Well, the quest will soon be over, for I suppose that five days will finish you off, if some tempest does not hurl you down on the pointed rocks beneath you before that time has elapsed."

"Do not be too confident," answered the boy; "my friends will soon find me, and I warn you to keep out of their way, or it may be the worse for you."

"What, the Christianized nigger and the Scotch deserter?" retorted De Cruz. "Oh, no, I am not afraid of them finding you. Well, just let them do so if they can. For my own part, I am quite satisfied that this crag will be the tomb of the heir of the Macalpines."

The boy made no reply, but, leaning on his rifle, again gazed anxiously around him.

"Ah," said the half-caste, tauntingly, "you may look round you as much as you like, but it will be no good, trust to me. However, there is another chance of life for you, for you can sustain life on raw ghoorul."

"Andrew De Cruz," said Donald, solemnly, "it seems to me you are acting very wickedly. What have I done to you that should cause you to pursue me with such venomous hatred? I for my part am quite unconscious of having done you the slightest wrong."

"Wrong!" returned the half-caste, grinding his teeth. "Your father turned me out of his employment like a dog; and now that the sweet morsel of revenge is presented to my lips, shall I abstain from partaking of it? No, no, you spawn of the old serpent! I will no longer even give you the consolation of the presence of a human being, but will leave you to your miserable reflections. But I shall not be far off, and when, with your lips parched and blistered with thirst, you plead to Heaven for a drop of water, I shall hear your despairing accents, and when the pangs of hunger torture you, I shall, though unseen, witness your anguish. Farewell for the present, Donald Macalpine, and occupy yourself in thinking of the hideous fate that is in store for you!"

And creeping away cautiously, the half-caste disappeared down the slope.

Left to himself, Donald for a moment gave way to a feeling of the most intense despair; the pillar upon the top of which he was perched had a sheer descent of at least two hundred feet upon all sides, and the boy's head grew dizzy as he gazed cautiously over the edge.

Then the idea struck him that he might make his friends hear by discharging his rifle, and raising it to his shoulder he fired several shots in the air, and curiously waited to hear if the signal was answered.

No reply, however, came, and placing his hand in his pouch for the purpose of reloading his rifle, he discovered to his horror that he had omitted to replenish it and that not a single cartridge remained.

Casting himself upon the hard and flinty rock he remained prostrate for some minutes, and was only aroused by the jeering voice of the half-caste, who had merely made a pretence of returning, and had crept back unseen to glut his eyes with the sight of his victim's agonies.

"And so," remarked De Cruz, drawing up his tall figure to its utmost height, "you have expended your last cartridge, and cannot hope to communicate with your friends by that means. Do not despair, however, for your ingenuity will no doubt suggest some other means. Raise your voice, shout, it will do one good to hear you, and do not believe for a moment that

you will ever be rescued from the stony pillar which you have chosen as your last resting place. How my heart leapt with joy as I heaved and strained at the tree trunk, and with what delight I heard it fall thundering into the abyss. Good-bye, again, I am going to my dinner, and will leave you to the enjoyment of your raw ghoorul, which if you do not eat soon will become terribly tough. You see I am not afraid of your shooting at me any more."

And throwing his gun over his shoulder, the half-caste swaggered off with a sardonic smile upon his countenance.

Determined not to give his enemy the satisfaction of seeing his anguish, Donald sat down on the body of the mountain goat, and placing his now useless rifle across his knees, gazed listlessly into the blue sky above him.

High up he saw a number of black spots floating amidst the clouds, in which his practised eye easily detected the great vulture of the mountain.

"Ah," sighed Donald, "if I had but a pair of wings like those fellows have, I could soon get out of this hideous place, and show De Cruz that he was entirely out of his reckoning in fancying that he had shut me up on a spot where I must die of cold and hunger, unless my friends can contrive to find out my whereabouts."

As these thoughts passed through his mind the spots grew larger, and the huge birds, who had caught the scent of the blood of the freshly killed ghoorul, descended lower and lower.

The boy's motionless attitude seemed to encourage them, for their circles grew shorter and shorter, and they wheeled round the summit of the rock uttering hoarse cries.

Suddenly he recollected the great strength of these creatures, as exemplified by the terrible adventure with the serpent that had paid him so unwelcome a visit in the rocky glen, where they had made themselves a comfortable habitation.

Remaining perfectly quiet, he mused how he might take advantage of the appetite of the birds for dead flesh.

Some of the vultures had by this time descended upon the extreme verge of the rock and sat solemnly blinking at the forms of the boy and the ghoorul with their great yellow eyes, evidently having their suspicions as to the advisability of approaching any nearer. Others soon found them, and in a few minutes a dozen of the loathsome creatures with their bare necks and untidy plumage were watching Donald intently.

The idea that one last chance of safety yet remained, had passed through Donald's mind. It was a very hazardous one,

but then his position was so frightfully perilous that no risk was too great to venture so as to escape from the horrible death of starvation and exposure that awaited him.

"The vulture," thought he, "shall bear me to the bottom of the precipice. My weight will, I fear, prevent him from flying much, but at any rate his flapping pinions will break my fall, and if I reach the bottom with unbroken bones, I shall easily contrive to find my way back to our winter camp."

Nerving himself for the terrible task before him, the boy remained perfectly motionless, and even closed his eyes lest the movement of the pupils should disturb the birds.

He could hear the rattle of their talons upon the rock as, encouraged by his immobility, they came close to the dead goat, and their hoarse croaking seemed quite close to his ears.

Suddenly, the fetid odour that rose around him on all sides showed that the birds were almost upon him; then opening his eyes he made a grasp at the nearest vulture, which was fortunately one of the largest size.

Grasping the thickly feathered thighs of the bird, Donald bent down his head to avoid the stroke of the beak as the terrified creature rose up in the air heavily, with hoarse cries endeavouring to shake off his unwelcome and unexpected load. The other birds rose screaming on all sides.

The bird to which Donald had attached himself, endeavoured to join his fellows, but then the weight proved too great for him, and flapping his pinions wildly, the great vulture managed to cross the precipice, fly across the crest of the ridge of hills, and then with extended wings sank slowly to the bottom of the valley, with Donald still clinging to it.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EARTHLY PARADISE.

THE bird staggered heavily beneath its load, but the boy clung firmly to it; rocks, trees and slopes seemed to whirl and fly now before his eyes as with dangerous velocity he sank down into the valley.

His brain reeled, his eyeballs seemed to start from his head, and he was almost suffocated with the odour of carrion that exhaled from the bird of prey.

A feeling of faintness came over him, and he was only aroused from it by a heavy bump on the ground and the feeling that he was being rolled over and over, whilst a heavy pair of pinions were beating and flapping against his face.

Mechanically he unclosed his eyes and relaxed his grasp, and saw that he was lying at full length in the centre of a large bed of blue and yellow flowers of very sweet perfume, and of a kind he never remembered to have seen before. All around him were similar beds of great but geometrical slopes filled with other flowering plants which were equally unknown to him.

His first glance showed him that he was in the midst of a carefully tended garden, with levelled walks edged with hewn stone balustrades, and adorned with fountains whose lofty jets fell in silvery sparkles into wide though shallow basins.

A few paces from him, with dishevelled plumage and drooping head, stood the great vulture, its beak wide open and its breast heaving and quivering with the unwonted exertions that it had undergone.

"Poor old fellow!" murmured Donald, rising with difficulty to his feet, and feeling sorely bruised and shaken as he did so. "I owe you my life; but what on earth can I do to reward you? You are a good deal too savage and hideous for me to make a pet of; besides, I suspect you would want as much raw meat daily as would keep a full-grown man. I hope that nothing will happen to you for having acted as my involuntary balloon; but really I am not in a position to protect you."

As the boy spoke, he made a few steps towards the giant bird; but the vulture, with a hoarse scream of defiance, spread his broad wings, and hopping along for a yard or two managed to raise himself in the air.

At first he seemed to find great difficulty in ascending, as though still oppressed by the weight of his unusual load, but after a few gyrations he contrived to mount more easily, and slowly rose to the crest of the mountains by which the valley was shut in, over which he disappeared.

"And there goes my last link with the outside world," said Donald, as the last traces of the vulture disappeared from view. "And now to find out where I have got to. It about seems to me as if I was in the pleasure-grounds of some monarch; and yet I saw no gardens or any sign of a royal habitation."

He walked to one of the fountains, and looking into the transparent water in the basin saw that it was filled with shoals of small fish of the most brilliant hues and colours; the topaz,

ruby, sapphire, and emerald, all finding a representative amongst them. The little creatures seemed to have no fear of the stranger, but swam confidently up to the edge of the basin as though expecting to be fed.

"Strange," mused the boy; "they are evidently not unaccustomed to the sight of man; and yet I can see no trace of any human inhabitant."

He passed along a broad walk, which seemed composed of brilliant crystals crushed almost to the consistency of powder, admiring as he did so the beauty of the trees and the fragrant perfume of the flowers, and revelling in the silvery plash of the fountains as the waters rose and fell with perfect regularity. He fancied, from the hurried glance that he cast around him, that the garden was about eight hundred yards in breadth, and enclosed between two walls of marled rocks.

Upon the one side, these were scooped out and almost perpendicular, but upon the other they had been hewn into terraces and small buildings, until it seemed like the façade of some gigantic cathedral.

As for the length of the pleasure-ground, it seemed indefinite, for as far as the eye could reach was the same vista of leafy trees, fragrant flowers, and silvery fountains in one seemingly long line of continuity. Still he saw no trace of the inhabitants of this earthly Eden, and he was on the point of sitting down and resting himself, for he was sick and giddy from the effect of his strange aerial travel, when he heard the loud clang of a brazen instrument which seemed to issue from the very bowels of the sculptured rocks. Donald turned in the direction from whence the sound came, and saw a procession of small men issuing from one of the carved portals of the cliffs.

They were strange and diminutive looking creatures, none of them more than five feet high, with strongly marked Calmuck features, and dressed in strange and ungainly garbs such as Donald never remembered to have seen before.

They were all well-armed, some with two handed swords with serrated blades, and odd-looking spears with trident shaped heads; others carried double-headed battle-axes, and all bore round shields with a round object from which a ray of light seemed to be radiating, painted upon them.

With solemn steps and the continued loud fanfare of trumpets, the armed band descended a flight of steps, which were almost hidden behind a mass of flowering shrubs, and approached the intruder with levelled lances and upraised swords and axes. Donald was utterly unarmed, save his hunt-

ing-knife, and was therefore not in a position to offer any resistance.

He threw up his arms in the air to show that his hands were empty.

The men-at-arms made no attempt to harm him, but surrounded him in a threatening circle with the points and edges of their weapons still directed towards him. Suddenly a loud blast of brazen instruments was heard, and another figure appeared in an archway still higher up in the sculptured face of the rock. It was that of a man much taller than the men who surrounded Donald, who had a long white beard hanging down on his breast.

The expression of his face was mild and calm, and at a signal from him the guardians of the garden drew back a pace or two and lowered their weapons.

"Strange!" said the old man, in clear and distinct tones, using the Hindustani language. "How is it that you have found your way into this secluded retreat, where the feet of the denizens of the outer world have never penetrated?"

For a moment Donald was unable to reply, but at last with an effort he answered:

"I flew down from yonder crest of this ridge; but I had no intention of intruding."

"Flew down!" said the aged man. "Take care what you are saying, young man; it is terrible to hear the words of falsehood from the tongue of youth."

"I am speaking the truth," answered Donald, boldly. "The great vulture of the mountains bore me here without my knowing where I was coming to."

"The great vulture of the mountains!" repeated the old man in accents of surprise. "My son, my son, beware of the spirit of untruth."

"I do not lie," returned the boy, indignantly; "but my story is a long one, and I am faint and weary with my journey. Permit me to have a little rest and refreshment, and I shall then be in a condition to tell you everything more plainly and exactly."

At this moment one of the armed men, who had gone a little further down the garden, ran forward holding in his hand several feathers which had fallen from the wings and breast of the vulture, and scrambling up to the old man, presented them to him with a low obeisance.

The aged dignitary, for such he evidently was, looked at them attentively, and then a smile of satisfaction beamed over his face.

"The strange youth, perchance, has only spoken the truth, though his tale appears wild and wonderful. Bring him up to the palace and let him have food, drink, and rest; after that let him come into the presence and repeat the story of his journey hither. I have but little time to attend to such matters now that the messenger of Death knocks impatiently at the door and summons my poor brother to his dread abode."

For an instant all the armed men hid their faces behind their shields, and then with a clank of steel and a fresh burst of martial music, one who appeared to be the leader made a beckoning motion with his sword to Donald as though to request him to follow him.

Before doing so the boy glanced upwards, but the old man had disappeared from the spot where he had been standing only a minute before.

The guards escorted their prisoner—for such Donald felt he must consider himself—up the flight of steps and into a narrow vaulted passage, the floor of which ascended in a gradual slope, and which led into a hall of such magnificence that the boy stopped short absolutely confounded at the blaze of splendour that met his eyes.

A soft light was thrown upon this chamber by means which the boy could not discover, but which left no portion of it in shadow; mosaic pillars hewn from the living rock supported the roof, and banners emblazoned with gold and silver depended from the walls, which blazed with the intense hues of all the precious stones that human labour has ever torn from the grasp of nature. The very floor upon which they stood was of the purest rock crystal, and reflected every figure and object like a vast sheet of looking-glass.

His guardian, however, permitted him but little time to admire the beauties of the wonderous hall, but hurried him through a side-door into a small chamber, which was tastefully if more simply decorated with hangings of blue and white of some soft material. A couch was in a corner, and a table in the centre, and at a sign from the officer the latter was now covered with a wondrous meal, which, with a wave of his hand, he invited the boy to partake of.

Donald approached the board, and saw that the repast was entirely composed of vegetables, stewed in various delicious forms, and the crystal jugs which stood upon the table were only filled with pure water. Nothing daunted, however, by the absence of meat, the boy sat down and made a hearty repast, to the evident satisfaction of the officer of the guard,

who had dismissed his men and was leaning against the doorway.

When Donald had completed his meal, he rose from the table, and without waiting to be invited, threw himself upon the couch, for he was utterly worn out with the trials, both mental and physical, which he had that day gone through.

Again the officer gave an approving smile, then drawing the point of his sword across the doorway, as though to indicate that Donald must not attempt to pass through it, he tapped the hilt significantly and withdrew. Simultaneously upon his departure half a dozen grotesque little boys, richly dressed, entered the room, and surrounding the couch, gently waved the fans they carried in their hands over Donald's head, accompanying their movements by a low crooning song.

Yielding to his fatigue, and to the gentle feelings of languor produced by the evolutions of the fans and the monotonous tune of the song, Donald closed his eyes, and in a few moments was buried in a profound sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE TOILS.

GREAT was the consternation of the Ladâki and Rab when the young sahib did not make his appearance at the camp that evening. Until it grew dark they had felt no uneasiness, thinking that doubtless he had wandered far in pursuit of game, and had found it a harder task than he imagined to bring the quarry home.

As the hours passed on, however, their uneasiness increased proportionately, and yet they felt the utter futility of proceeding forth to search for him whilst the black mantle of night still hung over the mountains.

"The brightest torch that we could manufacture," remarked Dhurrumdasa thoughtfully, "would only cast a light for a few yards rounds us, and would in addition not last long. I much fear that we must put off our search until daybreak."

"An' that's joost my ain thochts, fren, Dhurrumdasa," returned the Scotchman; "the lad is a canny cheil, and no' wanting in gude sense. Nae doot finding himself belated in the hills he has camped oot, and is enjoying a gude slice of roast mut-

ton, whilst we ha'e naething ta pit intil us but these chupatties, which from the depths of my hairt I loathe and mislike."

"Fervently do I hope that you are right," replied the Ladâki with a sigh. "As you say, the young sahib knows the hills well, and is not likely to do anything rash; but for all that there is such a thing as a slip of the foot, or a stagger upon the edge of a khud (precipice), that has been fatal to many as good a mountaineer as he."

"Hech, mon, cease yer croakin, an' let us pit a' oor trust in Providence," returned the Scotchman. "The lad is carefu' and is a gude lad in addition, an' we maun hope that no harm has come ta him. To-morrow wi' the first beam o' day we will be oot in sairch of him, and the chances are that we shall meet him coming to the camp with a gude fat ghoorul across his shoulders, an' singing as blithe as ony lavrock."

"Heaven grant that we may," observed the Ladâki. "If he has only kept clear of the salt lake, with all its hideous monsters, I have but little fear for him; but you, Rab, have no conception of the fierce and hideous creatures that lurk in its depths."

"Hoots, mon, are your wits gone wool-gathering?" asked Rab, contemptuously; "dinna ye racklact that Maister Donald turned aff ta the richt, which is joost in the very opposite direction ta the wee bit watter that ye ca' a lake up here, and that he is too keen a sportsman ta gae an' look for deer in a heap o' salt mud an' slime?"

The Ladâki's face brightened up.

"Very likely you are right, after all," returned he, "and that the young sahib, not caring to trust himself to the mountain paths in the dark, has lit a fire, and intends to pass the night upon the spot he finds himself in, and to return to camp as soon as it grows light."

"Weel, I'm for a snooze," remarked Rab, moving towards the heap of blankets which formed his couch; "wull you no' do the same, fren Dhurrumdasa?"

"Not yet, not yet," answered the Ladâki, with a wave of his hand; and whilst Rab snored comfortably between his blankets Dhurrumdasa prayed long and earnestly for the safety of his dead master's son, whom he had learnt to look upon with the deepest feelings of interest and affection.

With the first signs of dawn he aroused his companion, and after a hasty meal they took their arms and sallied forth in search of the lost one.

The trail was not a very easy one to follow even by daylight,

and skilled as the Ladâki was in reading the signs in rock and herb, it was some hours before they came to the spot where Donald had shot the buck ghoorul, and left it where it fell in his pursuit after the other wounded animal.

The vultures had not been idle, it was picked nearly clean, but the practised eye of Dhurrumdasa showed him at once that the ghoorul had only recently been killed.

"Strange, very strange," muttered he half to himself, "that the young sahib should not have returned to secure his game. I do not like the look of things at all."

"Nor I," said the Scotchman; "ta leave sic gude meat for kites and glids is no' natural like, an' betokens something quite oot o' the course o' common events. I am a'maist inclined the noo ta be of your opinion, Dhurrumdasa, that all isna richt."

"Come on," returned the Ladâki, hoarsely, "and keep behind me. Do not speak, and tread as lightly as you can; we do not know who or what we may see or meet."

Rab would have asked some more questions, but the Ladâki, with an imperative gesture, commanded silence, and with their guns ready for immediate use, the two men crept silently along the ridge.

The half-caste De Cruz, with cruel calculation, had not gone near the rock upon which he had left his enemy's son securely imprisoned, as he thought. For with the base cruelty of his disposition, he believed that a night's cold and hunger would go far towards breaking the boy's spirit, and perhaps induce him to utter prayers and supplications for mercy, which would have been as music to the cowardly villain's ears.

Cautiously approaching the spot, he was surprised at seeing a flock of vultures and other birds of prey sitting calmly awaiting the process of digestion, after having made a hearty meal upon the body of the ghoorul.

"This is very strange," muttered the half-caste; "how is it that the presence of the boy does not disturb these obscene creatures?"

"Has he in despair dashed himself down the precipice? If he has, I shall never forgive myself to the last day of my life for having missed the last act of the drama; but no," he added with his contemptuous sneer, "the lad has been too well brought up to dream of committing suicide, or any such rash and wicked act; perhaps he has stumbled over the edge in the darkness. Fortunately I have a short cut down to the bottom of the pillar—not such a short one, perhaps, as he has taken, ho, ho! but one which will perhaps give me the satisfaction of find-

ing his mangled remains, crushed and bruised out of every semblance of humanity."

Flinging his gun over his shoulder the half-caste turned away, and striking into a narrow and precipitous path, soon disappeared down the side of the precipice. In about an hour's time he reappeared, panting with his recent exertions, and with a look of intense surprise upon his face.

"Where, in the name of all that is wonderful, can he have got to?" said he, striking the butt end of his gun violently on the ground.

"He cannot have leapt over this yawning chasm, nor is it likely that his dear friends the Scotchman and the nigger found him and helped him out of his fix?

"On my life, if I thought that that was the case, I really think that I would go straight to the camp and shoot him through the heart and take the consequences. But no, I haven't the pluck to. I suppose I must be a coward at heart, for I dare not take a decided step.

"Get away, you vile brutes," he continued, throwing up his arms and scaring the vultures, who, gorged with their meal, rose up sternly and reluctantly from their perches.

"No, there is no sign of the lad," he went on, "and yet where can he be? I must find out the truth."

"And so must I," thundered a loud voice in his ear, as an iron grasp caught his shoulders as though in the clutch of a vice. "And so must I; and as sure as there is a blue heaven above us, if you do not at once tell me where the young sahib is, I will hurl you down yonder precipice."

With his limbs quivering with affright, and the hair upon his head bristling with terror, the half-caste turned round and met the stern glance of the Ladâki fixed upon him, whilst the Scotchman levelled the barrel of his gun firmly at his breast.

"Hech, ye black-visaged loon, gar ye mak' ain move, I'll joost pit a brace o' slugs through yer ribs. Haud still, mon, haud still—drop yer gun an' raise yer honds over yer head, sae that ye may tak' no unfair advantage."

However much the half-caste might have been inclined to resist, the iron clutch with which the Ladâki held him took from him all the hope he might have cherished, and with a sickly smile he let his gun fall to the ground, and raised his hands above his head as he had been ordered.

"And now," said Dhurrumdasa, whilst the Scotchman still kept De Cruz at the muzzle of his rifle, "where is the young sahib?"

"I know nothing about him," returned the half-caste, sullenly; "why do you ask me? If you have lost him, go and look for him yourselves."

"Do not throw away your life, for I tell you that you are in imminent peril of losing it," answered Dhurrumdasa, sternly. "I tell you that, unwilling as I am to spill blood, if you do not tell us everything you shall never leave this spot alive."

"In the buicks relating to the lives o' they worthies wham an unjust warld caid Pirates and Buccaneers," remarked Rab, "I ha'e read that if a chiel wadna speak, a cord twisted tightly roond the temples and a ramrod or a bit stick inserted tourniquet-wise, would gar him unloose his tongue pretty freely."

"You surely would not dare to torture me!" shrieked the half-caste, in mortal terror. "The law would not allow such a thing."

"The law!" answered the Ladâki, with a bitter laugh—"the law does not extend here; besides, unless I am wrong—and I pray heaven that I may be so—you are the last man in the world to evoke its aid.

"For the last time I ask you, where is Donald Macalpine?" and as the man spoke his hand mechanically moved towards the heavy curved knife called by the Ghoorkas a *kookeri*, which hung at his girdle.

"When last I saw him he was on that pinnacle rock," returned the half-caste, sullenly.

"And hoo, pray, did he get there?" asked Rab; "he had no' the wings of a bird, and nae mortal legs could carry their owner over that yawning abyss."

"I don't know," answered the half-caste, with a mingled glance of hate and terror. "All I know is, he was there and I saw him." His words ended in a shriek, for as he was speaking, the Scotchman stole behind him and gave him a sharp prod with his hunting-knife in one of his uplifted arms.

"Dinna trifle," muttered he fiercely, "or I'll cut ye inta collops, but I'll ha'e the truth oot o' ye. Quick mon," he added, as the half-caste threw himself on the ground and writhed in agony as he pressed his wounded arm; "speak, or ye'll wish ye had ne'er been born."

"There was a tree trunk stretched across, uniting the pillars with the ridge," returned De Cruz.

"You villain!" shouted the Ladâki, spurning him with his heavy boot, "you watched him into these rocks in pursuit of the wounded goat and then destroyed his means of return.

Let us make sure of the murderer," he added, turning to Rab Dalhousie. "If the young sahib is dead, as I am a living man I will hang him as high as Haman."

Disregarding the piteous cries of the half-caste, the two men drove their prisoner before them to the camp, and fastening him securely to a tree, again set out in continuance of their search for the missing lad.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE HAPPY VALLEY.

DONALD slept for some hours, and then awoke thoroughly refreshed by his slumbers. As he opened his eyes he gazed around him, and hardly realized the position in which he found himself. At length recollection of past events came back to his mind and he sprang to his feet and began to rearrange his dress. Directly the little boys saw this they ran out of the room, and returned in a moment with a large silver bowl full of fair water, and large towels of some white fluffy material with broad blue borders. Another of the diminutive attendants brought in a cake of fragrant soap in a crystal plate, whilst others handed to him for his use flasks containing odorous oils in quaintly carved flasks.

With these luxuries Donald speedily removed the signs of disorder from his dress and person, and no sooner had he done so than the officer entered the room, and beckoning him to follow, started slowly and solemnly out of the room.

Without a word Donald rose and accompanied him along a wide passage, the walls of which were of the same resplendent hue as those of the hall into which he had first entered.

As the boy and his conductor reached the other end, an azure curtain was drawn aside by unseen hands, and the pair went through a double line of guards whose helmets and arms gleamed with gems which threw out gleams of dazzling splendour.

At the end of this line of guards was a massive gold throne approached by four broad steps, covered with richly embroidered crimson velvet, upon which was seated the old grey-bearded man whom Donald had held converse with upon his first arrival in the garden.

"My son," said he, still using the Hindustani dialect,

"have you sufficiently refreshed yourself to be able to tell us how you managed to reach our kingdom which has no communication with the outer world?"

Bowing respectfully, Donald told him of his terrible adventure on the pillar, and how, as a last chance of escape, he had grasped the great vulture and taken advantage of its strength to venture down through the regions of air, until he had found himself in the beautiful garden, the existence of which he had never even dreamed of.

The old man listened attentively to the strange recital, and then giving some orders in an unknown tongue, one of the attendants brought the vulture's feathers that had fallen from the vulture upon a golden platter.

The aged man examined them carefully for a few seconds, and then addressing Donald, said: "My son, although wonderful, your story has the stamp of truth upon it. And now will you tell me your reason for living in those wild and desolate regions which I know lie for miles and miles around this happy valley, into which no denizen of the outside world save yourself has ever entered?"

The boy hesitated and looked confused. He had some kind of inward conviction that the old man and his quaintly attired followers were connected with the Vanishing Diamond, and he hardly cared to disclose his errand.

"My son," said the old man, with a look of some severity, "surely one so young and ingenuous-looking cannot have come here with any evil design. Be open, and no harm shall happen to you."

Thus adjured, Donald thought it best to keep back nothing, and gave a full account of the misfortune that had befallen his family, and the determination that his father and he had come to to set forth in quest of the mysterious stone. The big tears rolled down his eyes as he related the sad circumstances of his father's death, and his dying injunctions to his son to continue his search that he might secure a provision for his mother and sister.

As he warmed with his recital he poured out his words with more power and feeling, and even the cold impassive faces of the guard, who could not understand a word of what was passing, betrayed some slight symptoms of interest.

"It is enough," answered the aged man; "it may be, my son, that I may assist you in some way though not certainly in the way you desire. I will talk with you in private on this matter, but for a time you must submit to remain with us for a

brief space, for at the present moment I cannot see how you are to leave this spot.

"I am just now suffering under a severe domestic affliction, which will preclude my talking with you to-day, but I will give you a companion who speaks the language in which we have both been conversing, and he will take you about and exhibit all the treasures of this strange spot, so that the time may not hang too heavily upon your hands."

He clapped his hands thrice, and the attendant guards with a sudden movement clashed their arms together, and then marching in front of the old man and making a deep reverence as they passed the throne, filed out of the audience chamber. Then the old man arose from his seat, and, descending the steps, took Donald by the hand, and leading him down a perfect maze of passages, stopped before a low door and struck three times upon the panels of it.

A clear voice from within uttered some words in a language which Donald could not understand.

Beckoning the boy to follow, the old man entered the room, and a fair youth, who was bending over a table covered with manuscripts, rose and bowed respectfully on their entrance.

"O Syud El Aaraf!" said the old man, "thou art wise beyond thy years, and hast read and studied much; here is a stranger who has descended into the happy valley in a truly miraculous manner. He speaks the language of Hindostan, in which thou art a greater proficient than even I am; wilt thou be his companion for a few days, and show him all the wonders in this abode of peace and retirement? For a time he must dwell amongst us; but that the days may not pass too heavily, be thou his guide and friend?"

"Most noble Doolân," answered the youth, advancing to Donald with a graceful touch of courtesy in his demeanour, "I will willingly do all that I can for the stranger. I have, as you say, studied many books and many tongues, and if I may judge from his appearance, he is one of the white-faced race who have come to Hindostan from the island beyond the black water. I can converse with him in his own language.

"You are an Englishman, are you not?" added he, turning to Donald, and speaking in very good English.

"Yes," answered the boy, overjoyed at hearing himself addressed in his own tongue. "How is it that you speak English so well?"

"Hush!" answered Syud El Aaraf, with a faint smile; "you must first learn to abstain from asking questions about us re-

sidents in the happy valley. But the great Doolân has much trouble on his hands, and would, I know, fain leave us."

"Thou art right, O Syud El Aaraf," answered the aged man; "and so I will leave you with the fair-faced Feringhi."

With a stately inclination of his head, the white-bearded chief raised the azure curtain and disappeared from the room.

"Come," said the youth, taking Donald by the hand; "if you are not too fatigued, I will take you through this strange and wondrous place; but remember, ask nothing about ourselves. When the noble Doolân thinks fit to give you an explanation, he will do it himself. Come," and he led the way from the room.

With wonder filling his heart, the boy followed him through what appeared to be the rooms and corridors of a palace so vast that it seemed more like a vast city than a mere human habitation.

He showed him vast workshops, where a dwarfish race, similar to the guards, were engaged with strange implements in cutting and polishing fragments of rocks which gleamed and glittered under their hands. The red glare of furnaces came out with entire radiance in some, whilst in others wheels and screws were moved by some motive power which Donald guessed to be water.

"The inhabitants of the Happy Valley do not seem to be spending their time in idleness," remarked Donald, as they got into a quiet spot.

"We all work in our own way here," replied Syud El Aaraf. "And now tell me, would you like to see the result of this labour?"

"I should indeed," replied Donald; and his companion, beckoning him to follow, led the way into a part of the excavated palace which they had not yet visited.

Halting before a massive door, defended by copper coils and knobs of the same metal, El Aaraf raised his voice:

"O guardians of the treasure of the Happy Valley, the mighty Doolân hath sent a stranger to view the results of the industry of its inhabitants."

Without a sound, the door swung open, and a dwarfish figure with a shock head of black hair, and bearing a ponderous battle-axe in his hand, appeared upon the threshold with wonder expressed upon his features.

"Can this be true, O Syud El Aaraf?" said he, in harsh, grating tones.

"It is by order of the mighty Doolân," was the reply.

"Then enter," answered the strange figure, casting its axe upon the floor with a heavy clang.

The two youths obeyed, and then, with intense surprise, Donald saw that the whole room was filled with large silver bins, filled almost to overflowing with precious stones of almost every description—emerald, ruby, amethyst, topaz, and carbuncle were there in their thousands and tens of thousands, all of the first lustre, and unrivalled for their size and beauty.

"How like you this specimen of our industry?" asked Syud El Aaraf, taking up a handful of emeralds, and letting them fall again with a clattering sound such as hail makes upon a pane of glass.

Donald was utterly dazed at the sight of such accumulations of treasure. For a few minutes he gazed stupidly upon the mass of precious stones; then he noticed that one species of precious stone was absent.

"But I see no diamonds," said he.

"Hush!" answered Syud El Aaraf; "that is a word that it is forbidden to mention here."

Long time they wandered through the palace, and after that through the magnificent gardens and inspected all the wonders of the floral world, until Donald was thoroughly worn out, and with pleasure heard the proposal of El Aaraf that he should partake of his evening meal and then retire to his couch, which he gladly did, utterly confounded with the strange sights he had witnessed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SEQUEL TO THE STORY OF THE DIAMOND.

EARLY the next morning El Aaraf was by Donald's bedside, and told him that the great Doolân wished to see him as soon as he was ready.

Springing from his couch, the boy made a hasty toilet, and then followed his conductor to the chamber of the chief. He passed through the same lines of soldiers, who were now all dressed in black, and their eyes were bent upon the ground with an expression of the deepest grief. Large black curtains studded with silver stars hung over the doorway at the end of the corridor, and the face of the old man appeared with large tears trickling down his features.

"Come in," said he, addressing Donald; and the boy, leaving El Aaraf, passed through the curtained doorway, and found himself in a vast circular room, all draped in black embroidered with similar silver stars to those upon the curtains at the portal. Upon a bier in the centre of the room lay the dead man, so exactly resembling the great Doolân in form and feature, that Donald absolutely started and looked to see if the old man was standing by his side.

"My son," said the aged man, "I told you that I was in deep affliction. Whilst there was life there was hope; but now that the spirit has passed away, and only the empty shell is left, of what use is grief and anguish? What is inevitable is inevitable, and tears and lamentations are of no avail."

Donald murmured a few sentences of condolence; but the old man motioned him to be silent.

"You have come into these regions, as you told me, to search for the great diamond that belonged to my ancestor the Rajah Doolân, who met with so cruel a fate at the hands of the Tartar conqueror, Kenghis Khan. You have heard the first portion of the story of this ill-omened stone; but now I will tell you the sequel. I and the dead man who lies there so calm and still on yonder bier are the last descendants of the Rajah Doolân. Now that my brother has passed away and I have but a few years to live, even if I have so long a space allotted to me, the old race will be extinct, and the dwellers in the Happy Valley will have to seek for a new ruler. Before our great grandfather Rajah Doolân's death, he solemnly adjured his wife to continue the search for the missing diamond, and every night of the anniversary of his cruel affliction to exhibit the diamond, when found, in such a manner that Kenghis Khan might endeavour vainly to recover it. And now let me tell you at once that the great diamond was *never* found again, and no doubt still lies buried beneath the mountains that was again heaped over it by the orders of the Tartar invader."

"What!" exclaimed Donald, "do you really mean to say that the diamond is a myth after all? Why, I saw it with my own eyes."

"Be patient, my son," returned the old man, "and you shall learn all. Remember that in some cases the organs of sight may deceive one, and that what seems the finest realities of life are but vain delusions of the imagination. Many years before the great Rajah had formed this Happy Valley, the entrance to which was kept a secret from the outer world, and

had brought hither a family of dwarfish artificers, who were thoroughly skilled in the art of cutting and polishing the rough gems with which the mountain abounds, he took great pleasure in amplifying and enlarging the excavations in the mountain, and collected enormous quantities of gems, which were stowed away in a special chamber designed for the purpose. More colonists were imported at different periods, and very soon the inhabitants of the valley reached their present numbers. Had the Rajah been able to escape to the valley, he might have secured his life and treasure; but he chose rather to risk all upon a single battle, which proved, as you know, disastrous to him.

"Well, my son, as I told you, no traces of the great diamond were ever found again, but for all that we, and my fathers before me, have always carried out the wishes of the Rajah Doolân."

"But how can you do that if you never found the diamond?" asked Donald, in some surprise.

"My son, you shall hear all," resumed the old man, "but now I want to speak to you about your own affairs.

"The inhabitants of the valley somehow or other connect the death of my poor brother with your appearance amongst us, and I greatly fear that your life is not in safety as long as you remain here.

"You must leave this as speedily as you can, but you shall not go empty-handed.

"The precious stones that are so much valued by the outer world are but as dross here, and you can take as many of them as you like with you.

"Come with me and I will show you the mystery of the so-called Vanishing Diamond, and you can at the same time help yourself to as many of the precious stones as you think that you can carry with you.

"I would fain have kept you here longer with me, and that you might have a chance of benefiting by Syud El Aaraf's companionship, but it may not be.

"It may be that my very hours are numbered, and when I am gone there will be none to protect you.

"Ha! who ventures to enter our presence uncommanded?"

The sable curtain swayed slightly as the youth Syud El Aaraf crept stealthily in, and in whispered terms of entreaty begged a word with the chief.

"The people," said he, in terrified accents, "are beginning to clamour and to urge the completion of the sacrifices.

They say that your brother's evil end was hastened by the sorceries of the intruder who came into the Happy Valley mounted on the back of one of those birds the carrion vulture."

As he spoke angry voices resounded, and the clash of arms was heard in the outer corridor; a hurried rush was made towards the curtains, then came a halt, a shuffling of feet, and low whispering.

"You see, I was not wrong," murmured Syud El Aaraf; "they will be here in a moment. Can you not save the young Feringhi?"

"I can and will," answered the aged man.

"Ho! without there, what means this intrusion on the dead? The presence of your monarch is ever open to those who have any complaints to make. Come in then, and in the presence of the dead brother appeal to the living one."

The curtain swayed back violently, and a crowd of soldiers and mechanics rushed in, but their ferocity died away as they found themselves in the presence of the dead, and they gazed upon each other with shame and confusion upon their faces.

"How is this?" exclaimed the old man, severely. "What unseemly disturbance is this in the house of mourning? However, as you *are* here, speak and let me know what it is that has prompted you to forget the grief of the living and the presence of the dead?"

"The white sorcerer must die," returned one of the mechanics, who bore in his hand a heavy forge hammer. "He has killed your brother by his magic spells, and he must die."

"My brother was stricken with a mental sickness long before the stranger entered this valley; surely you do not think that his death was in any way hastened by that?"

"We do," replied an inferior officer, stepping to the front, and shaking his naked sword fiercely, "and in addition you well know that it is death by our laws in any stranger to enter the Happy Valley. Such an event has never yet happened, but that in no way abrogates the rule. I say let him die first for having bewitched your royal brother, and in the second for having entered the valley without permission. What say you, am I not right?" added he, turning to his comrades and the mechanics.

"Yes, yes," cried they in threatening chorus, clashing their weapons together and scowling fiercely at Donald.

"Death to the sorcerer and the wizard."

"Am I no longer King," demanded the aged man haughtily, "that I am to be dictated to by my subjects?"

"The safety of the whole community is at stake, most noble chief," answered an older man than the rest, who, from the silver pen-case and ink-horn that he bore at his girdle, seemed to hold some kind of civil appointment.

"He contrived to come in, and he will contrive to get out, and will spread the news of our happy retreat far and near, and we shall have the idleness of the outer world coming here with all their vices and all their cruel wicked ways. I say, most noble king, that for the safety of the community he *must* die."

"Is that the wish and opinion of you all; is there not one voice raised for mercy? Are all your hearts set upon bloodshed? If so, I, even I your king, must give way and yield up the stranger to the hand of the slayer."

A general shout of approval rose from the assembled crowd, and several of the soldiers made a step or two forward as though to seize their intended victim.

"Stop!" cried the chief, springing forward between Donald and his intending murderers; "stop, I say. Do not forget that as your king I have certain privileges, and one is that I kill the intruder with my own hands. Not a word, you cannot gainsay it. The privilege is mine, and I claim it. I will slay the intruder. Syud El Aaraf, lead him away to the hall of sacrifice, and I will follow after."

Donald had not been able to comprehend a word of what had passed, though from the threatening looks cast upon him he felt it was of serious import to himself. As the youth touched his arm and beckoned him away, he followed hurriedly; whilst the king, kneeling by the side of the body of his dead brother, seemed overwhelmed with silent grief, and his riotous subjects with shamefaced looks crept out of the great hall which was now sanctified by the presence of the dead.

Syud El Aaraf led the boy to a concealed opening in the floor, down which was a winding staircase which appeared to descend into the bowels of the earth.

Then taking from a niche in the wall a silver lamp trimmed with a wick swimming in perfumed oil, he led the way down into the darkness.

After a momentary glance at the aged man, who still remained in the same kneeling position, Donald turned away and slowly descended the polished steps, which led down into what appeared a vast pit of blackness, illuminated by one feeble star, the light of the lamp borne by Syud El Aaraf.

All was very silent, and it was only after ten minutes of steady descent that Donald and his guide arrived at the ground which formed the flooring of the pit.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TOWER OF THE DIAMOND.

"SYUD EL AARAF," said Donald, "tell me, I pray you, what is the meaning of all this? The people seem angry with me, and I cannot tell for what reason, for I cannot speak their language, and have not therefore exchanged a single word with any of them."

"O stranger from beyond the black water," answered Syud El Aaraf, with a sad and melancholy smile, "the people are indeed angry with you, and clamour for your blood.

"Know you not that the king's brother and co-king with the aged Doolân, who had manifested such partiality towards you, has been long lying prostrate, stricken with a mental sickness, and that since you arrived in the valley he has gradually got worse and that this morning he died calmly and peacefully?

"The mechanics and soldiers, who are an important portion of the community, and even those who ought to know better," added the youth, with a slight scornful curl on his lip, "consider that you are to some extent the cause of this calamity, and with loud outcries demanded your blood.

"Have no fear, however, for the old man will save you yet, and has invoked the old law by which the intruder in the valley was to be slain by the hands of the reigning monarch.

"I feel sure that he has some device by which he hopes to preserve you. Wait patiently, and your suspense will soon be at an end."

"Are we to wait at the bottom of this deep well for much longer!" asked Donald, with a slight shiver.

"There is a door by my side," said El Aaraf, raising the silver lamp and discovering a low-browed portal close behind him, "but I know not where it leads to, and Doolân, the chief, alone has the key of it. Hark! I hear his step descending the stairs; it comes nearer and nearer, and if you glance upward you will see the light of a lamp similar to mine, which he carries in his hand."

Donald cast his eyes upwards and saw the feeble glimmer of the lamp growing clear and more distinct as the old man, who carried it, slowly and painfully descended the steps. His features were pallid and bore signs of pain.

"My son," said the old man, turning towards Donald, "bid Syud El Aaraf farewell, for you will never see him again in this world; his ways and yours lie in different directions. I am to blame in causing you to meet, if you feel any pain at parting."

The two boys threw themselves into each other's arms, and in broken accents murmured a farewell.

"Come," said the old man, who had stood outside during the farewell scene, "to me, my son—if you are not afraid of being alone with your executioner," and taking from his habit a golden key, he inserted it in the lock and threw open the door.

A long passage was discovered, which to the surprise of Donald was basked in a flood of radiance from a source which it was impossible to perceive.

With one last look at his friend Syud El Aaraf, the boy followed his conductor, and the door closed behind him.

After they had proceeded about fifty yards, the venerable Doolân turned to his young companion.

"We have a long journey before us, and my aged limbs would not serve me for so long a distance. Do you see those grooves sunk so deeply into the path?"

"I do," answered Donald, who had noticed these tracks, which seemed to die away into the far distance, the moment he entered the passage.

"Mark them!" and touching a ring fixed in the wall, a small car, capable of accommodating two or three persons, glided up to them, the four wheels fitting accurately into the grooves in the rock.

"Seat yourself behind me," said Doolân; and as the boy obeyed, he climbed with some difficulty into the first part of the conveyance, and pulling back a lever which appeared to retain some catch, the wheels of the machine began to revolve and the little car moved forward at a tolerably quick pace.

"I suppose you never saw a carriage before which moved without horses?"

Donald smiled at the old man's idea, for he had evidently heard nothing of electric tram-cars and railroads; but he merely bowed his head and said nothing.

"The machine is moved by water power," continued the old man, "and that accounts for its noiselessness. Is it not a capital invention?"

"It is, indeed," returned Donald, heartily, "and I am really very glad of a rest; but first let me thank you, King Doolân, for having saved me from a cruel death—for Syud El Aaraf has told me all."

"And so you do not think that I am taking you by this lonely road in order to execute the sentence for the crime of which you are considered guilty?"

"I am certain that you only mean well to me," answered the boy, "for you have been so kind to me during the short space that you have known me, that I feel confident you would not hurt a hair of my head."

"You are right, my son," returned the old man, laying his hand kindly upon the boy's head. "Wife and children have all passed away from me, and you seemed sent to me from almost another world to supply the loss that I have sustained; but here we are at our journey's end," added he, pulling the lever in a reverse direction; the wheels ceased revolving, and the conveyance stopped. Donald sprang lightly to the ground and assisted the old man to alight, and then turned an inquiring glance upon him.

Without another word Doolân led the way through a magnificent archway, resplendent with all the hues of the chrysolite and aqua marine, into a small chamber, the aspect of which filled Donald with wonder and surprise.

It was not of very large dimensions, and octagon in its shape.

In every corner were quaintly made chests, with curiously fashioned brass fastenings and lettered with strange characters, which Donald was utterly unable to decipher. In the centre of the room was a circular opening similar to that by which Donald had before descended, but in this case protected by a copper rail, open only where it was necessary for access to the spiral staircase that ran down it. The room would have been perfectly dark but for the lamp borne by the old man, and for a long circular kind of loophole about two feet in diameter and about six feet in extent.

Under this stood a massive table with several curious looking implements upon it, and amongst others a curious spherical crystal, hollowed out on one side and about the size of an ostrich egg.

"First," said the old man, a benevolent smile overspreading his features, "let me provide for that mother and sister for whom you have already done so much," and going to the chests which have been mentioned before as standing in the corners, he opened them, and taking out handfuls of precious

stones exquisitely cut and sparkling with the utmost brilliancy, he filled the boy's pockets, and then reaching down a large haversack from a nail and pouring a rich flood of emeralds, rubies, and sapphires, which flowed down in one sparkling flood, into it, flung the strap over the boy's shoulder, and then buckling it securely, said:

"My son, you have now about you a treasure such as many a monarch would envy you the possession of. The precious sparkling stones that I have given will realize, I believe, an enormous sum, and they will be more easily disposed of than the one great stone you hoped to obtain. And now I must repeat to you that the great diamond was never recovered, but that, obedient to their father's orders, the sons of the Rajah Doolân every night upon the anniversary of their father's death, in this strange chamber that reaches to the region beyond the valley of rest exhibited a light which the ignorant supposed to be the lost diamond of the Rajah Doolân, but which in reality was this hollowed-out crystal sphere"—and as he spoke he took up the globe that lay upon the table—"with a strong light behind it."

"Then," exclaimed the boy, "that was the real object that my fingers touched when I thrust them through the opening as I hung suspended by a slender cord down the face of the rock."

"I had fancied that you were the brave fellow who had performed so daring a deed," returned the old Doolân.

"I was endeavouring to carry out my father's dying request," answered the boy modestly; "but I assure you that for the moment it was a terrible disappointment, and I felt my heart die within me as I felt the diamond recede from my grasp."

"Well," replied the old man, "you will, I hope, have no reason to complain of the loss of the diamond, for you——"

"I should be the most ungrateful wretch in the world if I were not fully satisfied with your profuse generosity, O king! and from my heart I thank you. But the sad expression of your face troubles me. Can I, humble as I am, do anything to alleviate the sorrow that seems to have clouded your brow and chilled your heart?"

"No, generous boy, no!" replied the old man. "I feel that the sands of my life are nearly run out, and I think with terror what will be the fate of those unhappy dwellers in the Happy Valley when I have passed and gone to rejoin my poor brother who lies dead yonder. One thing I have determined, and that is to disappear in such a manner that none shall be

able to assert that I am dead, and that they will still await the return of him whom they were pleased to term a wise and beneficent monarch.—But this is not a matter for the ears of boyhood. Have you thoroughly secured all the precious stones around you?"

For all reply the boy showed the chief his pockets bulging with their valuable load, and the haversack securely slung across his shoulders.

"It is well," replied the old man, glancing at him with approval; "and though our faiths are not the same, will you not accept the blessing of an old man who, in the course of a long life, is unconscious of having wilfully injured any living soul, or of having neglected any of the duties that his position imposed upon him?"

Donald at once knelt at the chief's feet, and the old man, placing his hand upon his head, murmured a prayer in a low tone of the deepest pathos.

"Come," said he, as he concluded, "tarry no more; you have still a long and strange way to take you to the outer world. You are, as you know, now in the chamber from which the radiance of the fictitious diamond streamed forth, but it is impossible for you to get out by any aperture, and I believe you know sufficient of the salt lake and its hideous inhabitants to care to venture near it."

"I do, indeed," replied the boy with a shudder, "and not for all the precious stones that you have given me would I venture near that nest of terrible monsters again."

"Do not be too sure of that!" cried the old man, with a smile upon his face which the boy could not comprehend. "A rash vow is easily made, but kept-to with difficulty. But come with me, for I think my old limbs are sufficiently rested to enable me to perform the last stage of the journey that I have to take with you."

With these words he led the way down the spiral staircase, holding the lamp, which he had taken from the table, above his head. The boy followed in silence, grieved at the desolation imprinted upon the countenance of his companion, and somewhat hampered by the weight of his load.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MONSTERS OF THE LAKE.

As Donald neared the bottom of the shaft, a strange kind of half-subdued light of a greenish hue began to make itself visible, which puzzled the boy very much indeed.

At last, as he stood upon the black and white marble flooring from which the spiral staircase sprang, he saw, stretching away at right-angles to the shaft, what appeared to be a glass passage, but without the usual transparency of such a structure.

The last descendant of the Rajah Doolân led the way into this passage, and when they had proceeded about a hundred yards along it the old man stopped, and, with a half-smile upon his face, asked his companion if he could guess where he was.

"In some passage, walled and roofed with glass," returned the boy; "but the material of which it is composed is so opaque that I cannot see what is beyond it."

"Your eyes will soon be accustomed to it, and then they will be able to penetrate through what is at present semi-obscurity," returned the aged man. "Make a brief stay here for a little, and gaze at the roof, or sides, steadily."

Donald did as he was ordered, and after a few minutes passed in gazing steadily at the semi-transparent walls of the passage, exclaimed, "There is evidently a garden of some kind outside, for I can see shrubs to the right and left of me, and occasionally trees which seem to branch over and meet across the roof of the passage; but all looks black to me—all black, and I can distinguish no colour in them."

"The trees and shrubs which you see are all of that sombre hue," answered the old man; "but, tell me, can you see nothing else?"

Donald peered more closely through the semi-transparent substance of which the roof and sides of the passage was composed and then drew back with an exclamation of surprise and horror.

"How foolish I am!" cried he, recovering himself by a strong effort. "It really gave me quite a start. I had no idea that the glass, or whatever it is, had magnifying power. Why a simple toad, which I suppose has hidden itself amongst the shrubs, seems to be about twenty feet in length; and what an

ugly brute it is, all over bristles, and with great glaring eyes, and oh such a row of teeth!"

As he spoke, the boy pointed to a hideous creature, evidently of the batrachia species, which had rammed itself against the side of the passage, and was gazing in with fiercely twinkling eyes. It looked of enormous size, and was as black as night.

"The roof and walls possess no magnifying powers, my son," answered the old man. "You see the creature exactly as it is."

"In what place are we, then?" asked Donald, his cheek growing pale. "Ah! there is another and more fearful monster," he added, as a gigantic reptile of the lizard species crawled over the roof of the passage, and gazed hungrily down at the tenants of it.

The mighty reptile had huge webbed feet with formidable claws, a line of sharp spikes along its back, and its jaws were garnished with a most formidable row of teeth.

"Can you not guess?" returned the chief of the Happy Valley. "Have you never seen such creatures as these before?"

But Donald could make no reply, overcome as he was with terror, for the transparent side of the passage was now blocked up and darkened by a crowd of such hideous creatures as ever Fuseli in his nightmare-inspired pictures had ever painted.

Huge serpents, with long shining manes, reptiles of gigantic size, with hundreds of legs, terminating in cruel heavy claws. Things which seemed half-bird and half-reptile, with long necks, round bodies, and fins instead of wings. The horrible octopus was there, but fifty times larger than those caught on the shores of the Channel Islands. Enormous crabs and masses of what appeared to be great worms tied together in an indistinct knot, and uttering cruel hissings with impotent malice. Occasionally, as these hideous creatures crowded and jostled each other, a fierce contest would arise; the gigantic jaws opened and closed with formidable rapidity; the heavy paws rose and fell, dealing crushing blows with their terrible claws, and the scaly tails swept round, dealing blows with seemingly resistless force.

Bold as Donald was, the sight of those fearful monsters cowed his spirit, and he crept up closer to the old man, and, taking his hand in his, gazed inquiringly into his face.

"You are quite safe, my son," remarked the old man, in reassuring accents. "Powerful and malicious as those mon-

sters are, the barrier between us and them would defy all their efforts to destroy. Can you not guess, I ask you again, where you are?"

"I am sure I have seen that horrible brute before, in the waters of the great salt lake," answered the boy, pointing to another monster which had suddenly made its appearance, and was gazing full into his face through the crystal wall of the passage.

That creature was even more terrible than the others, because it had something human about it. The face somewhat resembled that of a man, but with huge protruding eyes and gigantic fangs, which protruded far beyond the lips. There was, however, no expression of intellect upon the features, but merely a look of brutal and sensual malice. Gigantic fins took the place of hands, and this bewildering freak of nature terminated in a long forked tail, covered from commencement to end with rings of a bony substance.

"You are right," returned his guide, "and you are now far beneath the surface of that terrible receptacle for all that is horrible and hideous.

"The main entrance into the Happy Valley was closed by one of our ancestors with huge blocks of stone cemented firmly together, for a reason with which I am unacquainted. He was a man of great knowledge, deeply versed in science, and had discovered a process of solidifying the salt in the lakes so as to form a transparent pathway beneath its waters. This communicates with an underground passage to which we shall soon come, and is the only means of exit from the valley, and one with which only the rulers are acquainted. There is a hidden door at the end, and there, my son, I shall bid you farewell.

"Now let us push on, for the damp of this saline passage gets into my old bones. One thing, however, I must beg of you, and that is, that you will keep a profound secret the mystery of the entrance to the Happy Valley."

"I will pledge you my honour that a word relating to it shall never pass my lips," answered the boy, earnestly. "Can you think me so ungrateful as by any word or act of mine to injure one who has behaved with such kindness and unexampled generosity towards me?"

"No, my son; I have a better opinion of you than that," replied the ruler of the Happy Valley; "but I will not lay the seal of silence upon your tongue for so long a period as you propose. After three days you shall be free to talk as much

as you like, only if you are, as you say you are, and as I believe you are, truly grateful to me, promise me that on the third day from this, at the moment when the sun attains its full meridian, you will go to some position which commands a full view of the great salt lake, and wait there for a full hour. By giving me this promise, you will set my mind entirely at rest."

"I will certainly not fail you," answered the boy, much puzzled at the strange request; "and believe me that I would do a great deal more than that to show my gratitude to you for all your kindness. Will you not lean upon me, as you say that your strength is failing you?"

"You are a good and thoughtful lad," returned the old man, as he accepted the proffered aid, and the pair were once more about to continue their journey through the strange tunnel, when a sudden change in the scene outside attracted the attention of Donald and his aged companion.

The water, which had hitherto been calm and untroubled, had now become turbid and muddy, and there was a wild, mad rushing about amongst the foul creatures that had hitherto been gazing with covetous eyes upon the human food that had tantalized them. There was a confused scramble, snaps were made with terrible jaws, blows were given with claws armed with fearful curved talons, whilst huge pendulous tails vibrated and descended with crushing violence upon all and everything within their reach.

In a short time the whole crowd of fantastic monsters had disappeared, and nothing was left to remind the horror-struck spectators of their presence, save the mud which discoloured the turbid waters, and the swaying to and fro of the aquatic plants which had been pressed down by the sudden and violent movements of the reptiles in their hasty flight.

"What can be the cause of their sudden disappearance," asked Donald, who had been fascinated by this wild scene of turmoil and contusion.

"I cannot tell, my son," answered the old man. "I have never yet beheld a similar scene. However, I suppose you are not sorry that we have got rid of those loathome creatures, who gazed upon us with their hungry eyes?"

"I am not," returned the boy; "and, to speak the truth, their disappearance has removed a load from my mind, and I shall walk along all the easier from not seeing a host of ravenous creatures eager to pick my bones."

Hardly had he uttered these words than there was a fresh disturbance in the lake; the waters boiled and bubbled, and the black mud was stirred up in dense clouds, as a mass of the creatures again appeared rolling over and over in deadly strife, and as it seemed to Donald, contending fiercely over some dark object which was turned about from one to the other.

Sometimes the struggling mass of reptiles would be pressed closely to the transparent wall of the passage, and at others it would whirl away to some distance and then come rolling and tumbling over again. Not a sound could be heard through the crystalline wall, but Donald could see that the strife was deadly, and that cresent claw and pointed fang were doing deadly work in the savage affray.

Mechanically he stepped close up to the wall, and, impelled by a feeling of curiosity, pressed his face against it in order not to lose an incident of the hideous conflict. As he did so a small round object floated out from among the struggling monsters and came up against the outside of the crystal barrier.

Half fainting, Donald staggered back, for within a few inches, as it seemed to him, of his own face he saw a ghastly head which had been riven from a human body, and in the blood-stained features and the eyes filled with a look of the wildest apprehension and agony he recognized the lineaments of his inveterate enemy, Andrew De Cruz.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FIRE AND HEMP.

For three days the half-caste had been a prisoner in the hands of the Ladâki and the Scotchman, who had never ceased in their efforts to discover their lost companion.

Every day they scoured the hills and valleys in the vicinity, leaving De Cruz firmly secured to a tree during their daily absence.

The prisoner had remained obstinately silent and sullen, and had refused to add anything further to what he had before stated; and Dhurrumdasa, though half-distracted with grief at the unaccountable absence of the young sahib, would not permit Rab Dalhousie to try some of the means which he suggested to extort full information.

"Gif the donnert carle will na speak," said Rab, "let me pit a few hot embers between his taes, or else let me hang him to yon branch by his thumbs for a quarter of an hour. I'll warrant he will sune get gey tired o' keeping his tongue between his teeth."

But the Ladâki would not consent to torture, and solemnly reproved Rab for venturing to make such suggestions, persisting that kindness might have a greater effect upon their prisoner than severity.

"Kindness!" retorted the Scotchman with a contemptuous snort, "I tell ye fren' Dhurrumdasa that these half-castes are kittle cattle ta deal wi', an' that ye'll get no intelligence oot o' him wi'oot a due applecation of severity."

But the Ladâki refused to listen to any such arguments, and the half-caste, who was always present at these conversations, for Rab Dalhousie had not the smallest delicacy in making his suggestions before him, though he shuddered at the narrowness of his escape from torture, yet felt that the evil hour was for a time adjourned.

Dhurrumdasa in vain racked his brains as to what had become of the missing youth.

The rifle which was still lying at the top of the pillar surrounded by empty cartridge cases showed that the half-caste had spoken the truth, and that Donald Macalpine had really at some period been in that terrible position.

How he could have escaped from it was a mystery, as the most careful search around the base of the pillar had not brought to light the mangled remains of the boy, as his two companions were sure that it would.

Though in reality the half-caste knew not by what means the boy had effected his escape, the captors did not believe in the truth of his assertion, and attributed his denials of all knowledge respecting Donald's disappearance to the malignant obstinacy of his nature, and frequently told him that if he kept his lips closed much longer the result would be most unpleasant for himself.

It was a cruel position for Andrew De Cruz; daily tormented to answer a question which he was utterly unable to reply to, his life was one constant state of terror and anxiety.

To save himself from the slightest injury he would have invented a thousand falsehoods and poured them out with unflinching audacity, but in the present case falsehood would avail him nothing for the Ladâki stood before him with calm and unmoved countenance repeating the one unvarying

question, "Where is Donald Sahib?" and any lie that he might have invented would have been promptly discovered, and would only have procured him a temporary respite for a few hours from the same interrogations which were so constantly being put to him.

At night Dhurrumdasa and Rab had given up sitting up to guard their prisoner, contenting themselves with binding him hand and foot and tying him by a strong rope to a tree.

The rope, however, was sufficiently long to permit him to lie down by a fire which was always burning outside the tent, and which either the Scotchman or the Ladâki would replenish at irregular periods during the night.

The half-caste, whose evil conscience permitted him to have no rest, was in deadly fear that one day his captors would lose their patience and inflict upon him some of those tortures which Rab had often explained to him with hideous lucidity, and eagerly sought for some means of escape, but as yet none had suggested themselves to him though he thought of but little else day and night.

Upon the present evening the two adventurers had made a longer round than usual, and had returned to the camp much fatigued and discouraged by their want of success. The night was very cold, and after giving the half-caste his evening meal, which he devoured greedily, having been fasting since his captors' departure in the early morning, Dhurrumdasa made up the fire and then proceeded to tie up the prisoner for the night.

"Are you going to roast me at that great fire?" asked De Cruz with a sardonic chuckle—for his evil nature would not permit of his being civil to the men who held his life in their hands, though had they proceeded to extremities he would have grovelled at their feet with loud whining and prayers for mercy. "Are you, I say, going to roast me, that you are making up so gigantic a bonfire?"

"It wad be na mair than geeing ye your deserts," answered Rab, giving the prisoner a slight kick as Dhurrumdasa turned his back.

"What are ye yelping for like that, mon?" he added, turning fiercely upon De Cruz, who uttered a loud cry of pain at receiving this little attention at the hands of, or rather at the foot of, the Scotchman. "Gin ye do na haud yer noise, I'll cram a bit lighted faggot doon yer throat and burn oot that rascally lying tongue o' yours."

"Hush, my friend, no unnecessary threats or cruelty."

"I fear that our search for the young sahib is fruitless, and therefore to morrow I contemplate making my way back to Simla and handing this fellow over to the British authorities."

"And upon what charge, pray?" asked the half-caste with an insolent sneer. "No court in the world will adjudge me guilty of the death of a young cub whose body has not even yet been discovered. You are a very clever fellow, Dhurrumdasa, but in this case you have made a little mistake, and it is you and this beggarly Scot who will be punished for unlawfully detaining an innocent man, when I make my complaint, as I shall most certainly do to the Superintendent of the Hill States."

He burst into a roar of sardonic laughter as he spoke, and his black bead-like eyes gleamed and twinkled with malice.

"Mon," said the Scotchman, looking at him earnestly as he rolled about in real or affected contortions of merriment, "I think that you are fey fey, mon."

"And what di ye ca' that?" retorted the half-caste, endeavouring to imitate the Scotchman's pronunciation.

"I'm thinking that you'll know sooner than you look for," replied Rab, gravely. "Fey is joost when a chiel whose death is near at hand has strange and senseless fits of laughter joost about naething at all, or is in unusually high spirits wi'oot even the aid of a wee wee drappy whuskey.

"Fren' De Cruz, ye had better be thinking of the future, for I'm tellin' ye the truth, and that is that yer end is vera nigh."

The half-caste was silent in an instant; his laughter ceased and an ashen pallor overspread his dusky face.

Like all ignorant people, he was very superstitious, and the tone of confidence in which Rab had spoken had carried conviction to his mind and alarmed him terribly.

"Aye, Andrew De Cruz," continued Rab, pitilessly pursuing the advantage that he felt he had at last gained over his adversary, "you may sit there an' glower an' snap yer fingers an' thumbs as much as ye like, but you'll no dee awa' wi' a sign that has been proved *richt* for a hundred years and mair, sae if you're wise ye wad mak' a clean breast o' it the noo."

This, however, De Cruz declined to do, and permitting his captors to tie him up for the night, stretched himself down at full length as near the fire as his bonds would permit, without uttering another word.

Dhurrumdasa and Rab soon retired inside, and in a brief space their measured breathing indicated that they were fast asleep.

Incommoded by his bonds and terrified by the words of the

Scotchman, which added a fresh horror to the position, the half-caste still remained awake, lazily watching the fire and endeavouring, as usual, to hit upon some means of escape.

As he racked his brains, the fire, that had been somewhat carelessly built, collapsed in the centre and fell with a loud crackling noise, which, however, did not arouse the sleepers within the tent.

A large brand still blazing was projected within reach of the half-caste.

For a moment he was inclined to roll away, lest the sparks should light upon and burn him, but a moment's reflection caused a fresh idea to enter his brain. For a few seconds he remained perfectly still, to see if the noise had awakened his captors.

Everything, however, was perfectly still, and the regular breathing showed that the two sleepers were still wrapped in slumber. The half-caste felt that the long-wished-for moment had arrived, and, making a slight move, he placed the cord that secured his right arm against the blazing end of the piece of wood.

The rope was old and dry, and in a few seconds had caught fire and was burning as quickly as the nature of the material of which it was composed would permit. Setting his teeth and calling up all the little stock of courage which he possessed, the half-caste awaited the scorching and burning that was inevitable, and at last, making a quick movement, the rope parted and his right arm was free.

Extinguishing the sleeve of his coat, which was still burning or smouldering, the half-caste cautiously applied the brand to the rope that bound his left arm, and speedily got that free too. To release his feet was the work of only a few minutes, and then crawling like a snake along the ground, he made for the tent.

As he made his way in through the blanket that hung before the doorway, the first object upon which his hand rested was the Scotchman's hunting-knife, which its owner had cast carelessly upon the ground.

A gleam of diabolical satisfaction passed across the half-caste's face as his fingers closed round the handle and he drew the keen, glittering blade from its sheath. A rifle and ammunition were, however, absolutely necessary for him if he would not starve in his flight across the mountains, and he accordingly ventured in further. The fine one that the Scotchman usually carried was almost within his grasp, and as he cast his eyes

round in search of the pouch which contained the ammunition, they met those of Dhurrumdasa fixed upon him with a look of puzzled surprise.

The Ladâki was evidently only half awake, and believed that what he saw was the result of some evil dream. This, however, the half-caste did not know, and with a short exclamation of alarm endeavoured to glide out of the tent backwards.

The sudden movement completely aroused the Ladâki, who sprang from his bed and rushed upon De Cruz, who had by this time gained the exterior of the tent. The half-caste had before experienced the iron grip of the Ladâki, and knew that he would be but a child in that terrible clutch, so rising to his knees as Dhurrumdasa reached him, he drove the hunting-knife into the Ladâki's side.

The unfortunate man fell at once bathed in blood, and the half-caste, with a sharp cry of triumph, fled away with all the speed that he was capable of, unscathed by the two shots which Rab Dalhousie, who had been aroused by the struggle, sent after him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A TERRIBLE DOOM.

THROWING aside his discharged weapon, Rab Dalhousie sprang to the side of the prostrate man and raised him tenderly from the ground. Dhurrumdasa's eyes were closed, and his lips quivered as though he was enduring much agony. More than once he endeavoured to speak, but his tongue refused to perform its office. Rab slit open his garments and applied such bandages to the wound as his crude knowledge of surgery suggested to him.

To his intense delight, he contrived to arrest the flow ot blood, and Dhurrumdasa, with a deep sigh, opened his eyes and managed to articulate a few words.

"I am badly hurt," murmured he, "but go after that wretched man and bring him back. It seems to me as if we owe a duty to society in handing him over to the proper authorities and in preventing him from doing further mischief. You have stopped the bleeding of my wound. Help me back to my bed, and place water by my side. Then take your rifle and after Andrew De Cruz. He cannot have gone far, and you are swift of foot. The villain is unarmed save with the

hunting-knife which he drove into my side, and is besides a coward at heart, so that you will have no difficulty in making a prisoner of him."

"I cannot leave you, my puir fren'," returned the Scotchman, much affected. "You're no' in a state to be left alane."

"You must capture De Cruz," returned the Ladâki, exerting all his authority. "If I am to die, I shall do so in comparative calmness if I see you bring him back here bound hand and foot. Hasten, my trusty friend, or he will have placed too great a distance between himself and the camp to enable you to overtake him. He can run like a deer."

"Hech, mon," as, in obedience to his comrade's wishes, he assisted him back to his bed and placed a bucket of water and a drinking-horn by his side, "I can use my feet too, and mony a time in my own native braes ha'e I rin from a dizen of the laird's keepers when I and a few ither wild laddies ha'e gane oot to see if we cudna bring back a bonny haunch o' venison. And remember that daylight or starlight is a' the same ta me, so if you ha'e pit it tae your hairt that I should catch yonder louping murderer, be at ease, for I will soon be bock wi' him."

"Don't use unnecessary violence," murmured the Ladâki, faintly, as Rab inserted a couple of fresh cartridges in the breach of his rifle; "there will be no occasion for that, believe me."

"I will no use mair violence than is necessary," returned the Scotchman, carefully, "but gin the carle tries ta pit my ain jockteleg intil me as he has intil ye, my puir fren', I joost see gif a wee bit of lead in the arm will not cure him o' sic ootrageous conduct. Gude-bye, keep up a brave heart, an' I shall soon be bock again wi' the black-faced villain hard and fast by the thrapple."

With those words and a smile of encouragement Rab bent his head as he quitted the tent, and then, throwing his rifle over his shoulder, set off at a long, steady trot down the only path that led to the foot of the mound upon which the camp had been pitched.

He could see no signs of the half-caste when he reached the bottom, and for a moment he stopped, undecided which course to take, when a huge boulder came thundering down the slope of the steep hillside to the right of him, and it was only by a bound of the utmost activity that he avoided being crushed to atoms. The mighty stone went thundering on, crashing through the brushwood, and leaving a cloud of dust behind it.

"Rogues are amaist always fules," muttered Rab, as soon as he had a little recovered from the surprise. "Had yon chiel kept quiet the noo, it wad ha'e been no so easy for me ta have found whar he was lying like a tod amangst the heather, and noo, my laddie, I'll joost see gif ma legs will na carry me up to the top o' the brae, for it is ill wark walking aboot underneath a chiel wha has sae great a talent in flinging a bit pebble aboot."

With these words the Scotchman rapidly ascended to the summit of the hill from where the rock had descended, and as he pursued his way through the brushwood he saw a dark shadowy form start across a low portion of the mountains, endeavouring to take advantage of any atom of cover afforded by bush or boulders.

"Sae there ye are," said the Scotchman, dropping on his face behind a clump of bushes. "I'm thinking I could pick ye aff fine the noo, but my gude fren' Dhurrumdasa seems ta ha'e a fancy for keepin' ye alive, tho' what gude ye will be ta him or ony ither human being I am at a loss ta guess. But now I ha'e ye sure and certain; ye canna get away, and ye ha'e no means of procuring food tae keep yersel' from starving. I'll joost follow ye fair an' saftly. I can pit my hond on ye when I think fit. Hullo, De Cruz," he continued, raising his voice. "Dinna try ony mair of those tricks wi' stanes; they might lead to accidents; and I shall take gude care to keep above ye so that ye canna do ony mair of your knavish tricks on a puir unsuspecting body in the mountains."

The half-caste started as he heard the words that Rab shouted out to him, and with a fierce oath he started to his feet, shook his fist at his pursuer, and started off at a quick run.

"Gin that's yer game, laddie," exclaimed Rab, following his example, "here goes for a stretch across the hills," and with his rifle at the trail he followed the half-caste at the same long trot with which he had commenced the pursuit.

For two hours the chase lasted, Rab Dalhousie keeping some fifty yards behind the half-caste, and occasionally adjuring him not to give any more trouble, but to give in like a sensible man.

The half-caste made no reply, but occasionally cast a ferocious look of hatred over his shoulder at his pursuer, until he suddenly came to a ravine which ran for a long distance on either side and springing over it with an active bound, picked up a large stone, and, turning round, faced his enemy.

"Halt!" cried he, in a voice of suppressed passion; "if you attempt to spring across here, I will dash your brains out before you have recovered yourself."

"But, my gude fren'," observed the Scotchman, coolly, as he sat down on a rock and wiped the moisture from his brow, "I ha'e nae the stupid intention of joomping o'er the burn. I ha'e ye quite safe at the muzzle of ma rifle. Gin ye like a rest, laddie, sit ye doon as lang as ye like, and then we'll joost gae on again until I get tired, and then I'll pit a bullet intil ye, no' ta damage ye much, ye ken, but joost as a hint that we've had eneuch o' rinnin' aboot."

"What is the good of your giving me up to the authorities?" asked the half-caste, after a short pause.

"That's no business o' mine, laddie," returned the Scotchman, briskly; "that's atween my fren' Dhurrumdasa and yoursel'. Come, mon, gie in like a chiel o' sense, and if Dhurrumdasa is dead, be sure that ye sal no gae to Simla, for they wouldna hang ye, but send ye ta the broiling Adaman Islands, where ye would toil in irons the hale day in the hot sun."

"And if Dhurrumdasa dies you will let me go?" asked the half-caste, eagerly.

"Nae, mon; if Dhurrumdasa is dead, I will joost wash my hands of ye by pitting my rifle to your head and scattering your brains to the fair winds of heaven," answered the Scotchman, grimly.

"Dinna move," he added, as the figure appeared about to rise, "or I will send a piece of lead intil ye."

"Curse you! you have not got me yet!" shouted the half-caste; and he threw the stone he held in his hand with so true an aim that he struck the Scotchman on the arm, dashing his rifle to the ground, and then, with a revolting laugh, he tore away at full speed along the edge of the ravine.

Rab Dalhousie, however, soon recovered himself, and, picking up his rifle, sprang across the ravine as actively as the half-caste had done, and recommenced the pursuit.

The day was now beginning to break, and at some little distance could be seen the dark waters of the great salt lake, faintly tinged by the first beams of the dawn.

Towards this point the hunted man steadily sped, and it flashed across the Scotchman's brain that he had once remarked to Dhurrumdasa, in the presence of the half-caste, that the only thing he could not do was to swim.

The lake ran inland about half a mile from where the fugi-

tive and his pursuer were, and if the former could succeed in reaching it and swimming across it, the latter would have to make a long *détour* before he could arrive at the opposite bank.

Rather disconcerted at this, Rab redoubled his speed; but the half-caste put on a fresh spurt, and was soon staggering through the soft mud that bordered the lake all round for many hundred yards.

Rab, who knew the lake and its terrible denizens, stopped short, and, placing his rifle to his shoulder, covered the fugitive.

"I could hit him the noo," muttered he; "but then Dhurrumdasa tauld me that I was nae to do so, an' he is a chiel that somehoo or ainither mak's himself respectit; and yet it wad be a maircy to save the puir wretch frae the terrible fate that is before him."

Still the half-caste staggered blindly on, once almost falling as one leg plunged deeper into the mud than the other, and sending the mire and water flying in showers around him. All at once the Scotchman saw the mud move with a sudden and unexpected motion, as a huge scaly back appeared; then a gigantic pair of jaws opened suddenly, and the half-caste uttered a weird shriek of terror as one of the largest Saurians of the lake appeared, with all its terrors, only a few paces from him.

He turned and attempted to fly; but it was too late. With a rapid sweep of its tail the gigantic reptile struck the doomed wretch in the small of the back, and hurled him shrieking into the extended jaws, which closed with a hideous crunching snap. Then the creature, bearing the half-caste in its mouth, began to waddle through the marshy ground towards the deeper waters of the lake. The cries of the perishing man rose loud and shrill, and his arms and legs moved convulsively as he vainly strove to release himself from those hideous jaws, which were crushing the life out of him.

"Save me! save me!" cried he to the Scotchman, in tones of agonized entreaty. "Shoot him, and do not mind the risk of hitting me. Anything is better than the agony I am enduring now."

"Puir wretch!" murmured Dalhousie, "as if onything wad save him the noo. A' the banes in his body must be amaist crushed to a jelly. But it shall ne'er be said that Rab Dalhouse saw a fellow-creature perishing by sae miserable a death wi'oot pitting oot a hond ta save him."

With these words the Scotchman knelt down, and, taking a careful aim, fired.

The bullet went straight to the mark, and struck the monster on the side of the head, but was unable to penetrate the scales, and merely caused the reptile to give a convulsive start, which elicited a shriek of agony from the miserable wretch within its jaws. Again Rab fired, and this time with better success, for the bullet entered the soft space behind the fore-leg, and with a loud snort the monster fell over on its side.

It had by this time, however, reached the edge of the water, and as the maimed man struggled away from the creature's jaws, half a dozen hideous heads arose from the depths; jagged tooth and venomous claw were speedily at work, and the miserable half-caste, whose piteous shrieks were now growing fainter, was carried off to the centre of the lake, where the reptiles fought savagely over their undisputed prey. At length they bore it to the bottom of the lake, and only an occasional roar showed the terrified spectator of this awful scene that a terrible battle was being fought in the depths below over the scattered fragments of the body of the miserable half-caste, Andrew De Cruz.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WHITE FAWN.

STAGGERING back with intense horror at the ghastly sight presented to his gaze, Donald would certainly have fainted had not his aged companion hurriedly drawn from beneath his robe a flask composed of a gigantic ruby, skilfully hollowed out, containing some volatile cream, which he held to the terrified boy's nostrils.

The powerful perfume had its due effect, and Donald, resting back to the transparent side of the passage, gazed eagerly for the apparition which had so greatly terrified him. But it was gone, and no traces remained of that violent countenance and agonized features which had floated to him through the waters of the lake like some terrible vision of the night.

"What was it that terrified you so much?" asked the Ruler of the Happy Valley, as soon as he saw that the boy was in a position to reply to his queries.

"Did you not see it?" answered Donald—"a hideous,

ghastly head, the livid lips of which seemed almost to touch mine as it floated up to me on the other side of the glassy wall. It is true that I saw it but for a moment, but even in that brief space I was able to recognize the features, and they were those of my greatest enemy, of a man who would spare no pains to compass my destruction."

"The head of an enemy," returned the aged man, with all the calm philosophy of heathendom; "I had thought from your agitation that you had seen the features of a friend. If the man was hostile to you, you can afford to feel some resignation for his fate, though it must have been a terrible one."

Donald glanced curiously at the old man. He had been brought up to look upon matters in an entirely different light, but thought it better to say nothing at the moment.

The monsters had now all disappeared, and Donald and his friend resumed their walk through the crystal tunnel.

The distance seemed very long to the boy, who was anxious to rejoin his companions and relieve them of the suspense under which he felt they must be suffering; but the tottering steps of the old man greatly retarded their progress.

All at once the descendant of the Rajah Doolân paused, and, drawing his hand rapidly across his eyes, gazed with an expression of wonder, not unmixed with apprehension, at some object which he appeared to discover in front of him.

The boy looked up in the troubled face of his companion with an inquiring gaze.

"Am I dreaming?" cried the old man, wildly, bending forward his head and still looking steadily in front of him. "It is impossible that such a creature can have gained access to this road beneath the water; and yet, it must be."

"What animal are you speaking of?" asked Donald. "I can see nothing."

"The little white fawn with the golden horns and hoofs that is gambolling so playfully before me," returned the old man, who was evidently labouring under a feeling of intense excitement.

"I can see nothing," answered Donald, looking vainly about for the animal which his guide had described.

"Then my time is near at hand," returned the old man, recovering his composure with a strong effort. "The white fawn is a sign that has ever appeared to members of our race a few hours before death. My son, I am very shortly to quit this world of trouble. I can still see the little creature frisking

about in front of me, as though unconscious that it was the bearer of a sentence of death. There——it has risen up in the air; it floats away, bathed in a flood of light, and with it goes the few remaining hours of life of the last of the House of Doolân."

He sighed heavily once or twice, and then, leaning upon his young friend's arm, passed on his way.

The crystal gallery only extended for a few more hundred yards, and then from the huge rocks that peeped through the sides, and the fantastically twisted roots of trees which showed themselves through the soil, Donald perceived that they were no longer under the waters of the lake, but had reached some subterranean passage under the opposite shore.

Evidently he was right in his conjectures, for in a very short time they came to a flight of roughly fashioned steps covered with a sort of coarse cement, up which the old man slowly and painfully ascended. After a long climb they arrived at a small circular chamber, and then the old man, placing his lamp upon a projection from the wall, addressed his companion:

"As I said before, I entreat you to keep the secret of this passage to yourself for three days, and at the end of that period come to the nearest portion of rising ground that overlooks the lake, and you will receive a sign that will absolve you from your promise. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Donald; "but, believe me, after your kindness and generosity to me I should consider myself the most miserable creature in this world if I did not do all I could to set your mind at rest. If you wish it, as soon as you have shown me how I can rejoin my friends I will leave this part of the country, nor will I even linger the three days you have mentioned here."

"Not so, my son," answered the old man, kindly. "In three days' time I shall be no more. The sign of the white fawn is one that has ever had the same signification to men of our race. But I am full of years, and have no fear of the quiet and rest of the grave. See," he added, as, turning on one side, he pressed a copper handle that projected from the wall—"see, there is your way to the outer world."

A huge rock, which looked as if it had never been moved for ages, slid back, and the pure light of heaven peered in through the opening.

"Your way lies yonder, my son," said the old man. "Farewell!"

Hardly thinking what he did, Donald stepped through the

opening, which at once closed behind him, and he found himself alone on the hillside.

The whole aspect of the spot appeared to be familiar to him, and in a few moments he remembered he was upon a little wooded knoll only a few hundred yards distant from the camp.

With a cry of joy, he started forward at a run, and in a very brief space of time found himself at the door of the tent. The aspect of the interior, however, filled him with astonishment. His faithful friend Dhurrumdasa, the Ladâki, was reclining upon a heap of blankets, his features pale and wan and his side swathed in blood-stained bandages; whilst close to him stood Rab Dalhousie, who, with quivering lips and distended eyeballs, was evidently relating some tale which filled both listener and narrator with horror and amazement.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FALLING OF THE LAKE.

DONALD listened in silence to the tale of the ghastly fate that had befallen the revengeful De Cruz—indeed there were moments when he hardly listened, for he was kneeling by the bedside of the wounded Ladâki, and exercising the little knowledge that he had acquired from his father in readjusting the bandages, and endeavouring to allay the throbbing which gave the wounded man such pain.

After some time he partially succeeded. And then in his turn he repeated his tale of wonder, concluding with the hideous apparition of the dead man's head against the crystal wall of the passage beneath the lake.

Then he spread a piece of fair linen upon the floor, and opening his haversack, he poured a brilliant cascade of glittering jewels of every shape and size into it.

The Ladâki's eyes dilated widely at this wonderful sight, and Rab Dalhousie, starting to his feet, executed a wild war-dance, which he informed Dhurrumdasa—who had for a moment appeared to entertain grave doubts as to his companion's sanity—was a well-executed performance of "Ghillie Callum," "the maist celebrated reel step in braid Scotland."

"And now, my friends," said Donald, when he had added the contents of his pockets to the glittering heap, "we can pass the rest of our lives in rest and peace without any fear of

utter indigence. No diamond in the world, I believe, would represent such wealth as this."

"All the better for you, sahib," returned the Ladâki, a faint smile illuminating his polished features, "but I have no occasion for wealth, and when I followed your father, it was pure love and affection, and not from any desire of improving my social position in the world."

"Nonsense, Dhurrumdasa, my father had always intended we should share the diamond equally between us," answered Donald quickly—"what do you say, Rab?"

"Aweel, Maister Donald, ye are just pitting a sair temptation in a puir mon's way, but according to your ain showing the diamond was tae be divided between your gude father, your ain sel and Dhurrumdasa, and therefore I, wha came in as an interloper, ha'e nae claim til it."

"What nonsense you are both talking," said Donald, a little impatiently: "there was no such diamond, as I have just told you, and so as companions we share this prize which has so unexpectedly fallen into our hands."

"Into your hands, you mean," said Dhurrumdasa; "we had nothing to do with it. You found the treasure, and yours it is by every principle of right. Am not I right?" he continued, turning to the Scotchman.

"I'm thinking you are," returned Rab, after a short pause. "The wee sparkling stanes are a' Maister Donald's, and therefore," he continued, with a sly wink, "he can do what he likes wi' them—he may e'en give them away should his mind incline that way."

"A very judgment of Solomon," broke in Donald, with a merry laugh. "Well, as the matter is now decided, I need say no more: the stones are mine, and I can do what I like with them, either keep them or give them away."

"Certainly, sahib," replied Dhurrumdasa, promptly.

"That's richt," said Rab, with rather a melancholy expression on his face.

"Then we are all agreed," answered the youth, still with the same cheerful smile. "And all that we have now to do is to get our good friend Dhurrumdasa well, and to convey the treasure in safety to British territory."

"We may joost thank our stars," remarked Rab, "that yon chiel Kara Kaplân has been taken oot of our way; he had a nose that could scent oot plunder for mony a mile, and had he been alive he would a had a word or twa ta say aboot your batch of pretty sparklers."

"Hush," said the Ladâki; "let us pray that his sins are forgiven him, for he came to an awful end."

"Hoots, mon, you needna greet o'er him, for he did his best to slit your thrapple," answered Rab, philosophically. "But noo let us see what can be done wi' these bandages, and whether a little cooling fluid might not hasten your recovery a wee."

Until the third day Donald never left his faithful friend's couch, and he was delighted to see the condition of the patient improve daily.

The wound, though a deep one, had not touched any of the larger vessels, and there seemed every hope that in the course of three weeks the Ladâki would be on his feet again.

On the morning of the third day, however, Donald remembered his promise to the aged ruler of the valley, and setting out for the lake, halted upon a spot of rising ground, some five hundred yards from the shore, from whence a full view of its waters could be obtained.

The sun was shining brightly, but even its rays failed to brighten those dark waters. More than once a sudden upheaval of the waters, and a gleam of serrated back or a monstrous head, showed that the inmates were on the alert, and in search of prey.

Donald gazed into the black waste of waters, but his eye could not trace the crystal passage, which no doubt was sunk far below in the extensive depths of the lake.

"Strange that the old man should have begged me to come hither on the third day," muttered Donald. "I wonder what his object could have been. No harm was intended to me, of that I am sure, but I would give something to guess his reason for summoning me here."

As if in answer to his questions, there came a dull muffled roar which seemed to proceed from the very bottom of the lake, then the dark waters heaved up, forming a huge dome-like mass of water, flecked here and there with streaks of foam.

For an instant it remained in this position, then broke up with a loud crash into a succession of waves which dashed themselves upon the shore, covering the salt marshes, and even reaching the foot of the rising ground upon which Donald was standing.

The whole ground near trembled, and the atmosphere quivered with the vibrations.

Full of terror and surprise the boy remained rooted to the spot, watching this strange and unexpected convulsion of nature

All at once huge bodies floated up to the surface, seemingly slain by a flash of lightning, others rent and mutilated as if they had been destroyed by some explosion.

The white seething waters were covered with these hideous remains, which showed how sudden and unexpected had been the shock which had brought death and destruction upon the monsters of the lake.

Hardly had the agitated waters begun to calm down than, to Donald's intense surprise, he saw that the level of the lake was becoming rapidly lower, and that the waters seemed passing away through some unseen orifice.

For some hours he sat watching this inexplicable change.

He now felt sure that the aged man had for some reasons of his own, and with some explosive substance of great force with which science had made him acquainted, blown up the communication that existed under the water between the Happy Valley and the outer world, and the boy felt a little hurt at the evident distrust which this act of the descendant of Rajah Doolân betrayed.

His attention, however, was still bent on the lake, which he now saw was being rapidly drained away through an orifice which he at once conjectured must be the hidden entrance to the crystal gallery.

At length the last of the waters had disappeared, and nothing was left but the mangled remains of the monsters strewn about the rocky bottom of the lake.

The orifice through which the water had escaped was now distinctly visible, and on a sudden inspiration Donald cut down with his hunting-knife several branches of the resinous fir tree that stood near, and binding them together to form a torch, went cautiously down the bed of the lake to the aperture through which the waters had disappeared.

He shuddered as he passed the mangled bodies of the monsters which lay all around the orifice, through which they had been unable to pass.

Lighting his torch, he passed through the dripping portal. For some three hundred yards he pursued his way through the rocks, when all at once the light streaming in through a huge aperture showed him a sight that for the rest of his life he never forgot. He saw by the configuration of the rocks and a few of the sculptured images which yet remained, that he was gazing into the Happy Valley, but ah, what a terrible change had taken place!

Formerly, all was bright and cheerful—trees, flowers, palaces,

and industrious inhabitants, and now the dark waters of the lake had swept in and buried all beneath its waters.

Sick at heart, the boy crept back through the cavern, and to this day he has never been able to decide whether the old man, in destroying the crystal passage, intentionally opened a channel for the waters of the lake, or whether, knowing that his death was at hand, and that he was the last of his race, he had in obedience to the wishes of his ancestor, the Rajah Doolân, whelmed the valley and all its inhabitants in one universal destruction.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONCLUSION.

WITH a saddened heart—for he felt that Syud El Aaraf had perished with the rest of the inhabitants of the Happy Valley—Donald returned to the camp and narrated the sad sequel to his story.

Both Dhurrumdasa and Rab Dalhousie were much shocked at the sudden and fatal occurrence ; but regrets were useless, the evil had been done and there was no remedy for it.

Though the Ladâki had progressed very favourably, yet the winter was now so close at hand that it was impossible to think of returning to British territory, as all the passes through the snowy range would be blocked.

Every preparation, therefore, was made for passing the next three or four months in the camp.

It must be confessed that time hung rather heavily, and had it not been for the constant care that the Ladâki needed, there would have been little or no occupation for Donald and Rab.

Sometimes they were unable to go more than a few yards from their tent for three weeks at a time, but they kept up a cheerful heart and slowly but surely the weary winter passed away, and they were enabled to make preparations for a return to civilization.

The beasts of burden were in excellent condition, as they had been well housed and cared for ; and on a bright morning in the early part of March the little party started on the return journey.

It was not a very eventful one ; the party was so small and the amount of baggage so slight that they attracted but little attention, and in due time they arrived in British territory.

Donald at once communicated the sad tidings of his father's death to his mother, and promised to return to England almost at once.

There was hardly any market for the sale of gems in Simla, and Donald determined to dispose of the greater part in England.

Dhurrumdasa steadily refused any recompense. "I served your father, sahib," said he, "from love, and it would go against my heart to receive any kind of reward: take it all to your mother and sister, and with it the heartfelt wishes of their faithful servant, Dhurrumdasa."

"But look here, Dhurrumdasa," urged the boy, "I am not going to stay in England; I love the free life of the hills too much. See, I have sold four thousand pounds' worth of the precious stones here—it is all that I can get rid of. Two thousand pounds will suffice for me at present, and I want you to keep two thousand to restore the plantation to its former state, by my return."

"You really intend to return, then!" exclaimed the Ladâki, the tears springing to his eyes as he clasped his young master's hand with delight.

"Of course I do," returned Donald, "and perhaps quicker than you think, so look sharp with the work of restoration."

"An' I'm thinking, Maister Donald, that I'll just be ganging hame wi' ye," remarked Rab. "The auld regiment, as I'm hearing, is still in the Indies, and sae it's nae sae healthy a location for me at present."

"So you shall, my good friend," cried the boy, "and we can square up accounts on our arrival at home."

No further time was lost. Donald and Rab reached England in safety.

Mrs. Macalpine had by this time recovered from the first grief that the news of her husband's death had caused her, and blessed the Providence that had restored her son to her arms after passing through so many dangers.

The precious stones realized enormous prices, as they were of the first water, and such a profit was made by Rab as caused him to execute his favourite "Ghillie Callum," and fling up his bonnet in the air with glee.

He journeyed away to his own part of the country, purchased a farm and became a steady character, though he would at times rather shock the more serious of his neighbours by relating some of his experiences, commencing with, "Whan I was a meenister among a community they caed the Bhoots."

Both Mrs. Macalpine and her children had passed so much of their lives in India, that England had few charms for them, and so, after making all arrangements, they settled down at Simla—that is the mother and daughter did, for Donald lost no time in hurrying off to the renovated tea plantation, where he was received with open arms by the faithful Ladâki, Dhurrumdasa.

THE END.

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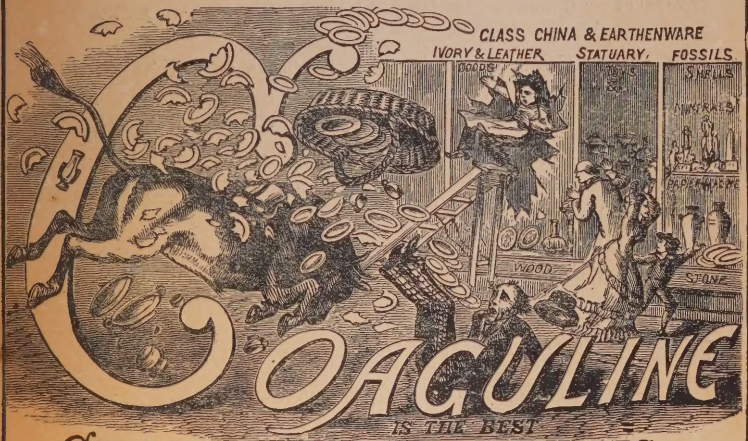

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